Local Food Promotional Initiatives in Southwestern Ontario: Linking Composition, Purpose and Producer Engagement

by

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ABSTRACT

LOCAL FOOD PROMOTIONAL INITIATIVES IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO: LINKING COMPOSITION, PURPOSE, AND PRODUCER ENGAGEMENT

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This thesis is an investigation of the *Buy Local* food movement which has become a motivating factor for producers, consumers, and community organizations. The growth of this sector has taken place in the context of a differentiated food system, one in which alternative rural food economies are intertwined with industrial "placeless" agriculture. Producers operating in the food system are exploring local food economies as part of their enterprise development trajectories. Although there are many perceived benefits to a local food system, producers often face challenges in managing multiple aspects of production and marketing. Numerous organizations have stepped in to act as intermediaries, providing producers with resources and promoting local food with media campaigns, local food maps, and special events. Intermediary organizations have varying levels of capacity that often changes as the organization evolves to adapt to available funding, community support, and stakeholder involvement.

This work expands the theoretical and empirical work on local food systems in two ways. First, it incorporates work by Quinn and Cameron (1983) and Jawahar and McLaughlin (2001) on organizational lifecycle stages with current work on local food organizations. This provides a unique way of understanding the capacity of an organization to meet identified goals and work well within their communities. Second, the work expands upon the notion of hybridity in the food system, introduced by Ilbery and Maye (2006), and provides empirical evidence of such activity.

The research draws upon interviews with 32 producers and 18 organizing members to examine the characteristics, structure, and relations of two local food organizations and producers

using the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* brand in Southern Ontario to examine the characteristics and relations of local food organizations and producers and further to explore the marketing and enterprise strategies of producers participating in the local food initiatives supported by the two organizations. Findings from this study indicate several key factors that are important for building a strong local food organization capable of meeting the needs of its stakeholders. Producers are showing an increased interest in garnering support from regional intermediary organizations, therefore there is a strong interest in strengthening the capacity to grow and support the diverse local food economy.

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PREFACE

This thesis has been prepared in manuscript format including three manuscripts written for publication in quality academic journals. These are preceded by an introductory chapter that provides an overview of the project and outlines the major objectives. The thesis finishes with a concluding chapter that highlights the findings for the entire project.

Authorship of the first and second manuscripts is shared between the student and her thesis advisor. Following the guidelines set forth by the Department of Geography, it should be noted that the manuscript is dominated by the intellectual effort of the student.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

HPFTTN	Huron Perth Field to Table Network
FLW	Foodlink Waterloo
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
PDO	Protected designation of origin
BLBF	Buy Local Buy Fresh
HFTTN	Huron Field to Table Network
HCHU	Huron County Health Unit
HBDC	Huron Business Development Corporation
GFB	Good Food Box
OMAFRA	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
PASA	Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
UPC	Universal Product Code

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Food production and consumption has long captured the interest of geographers, first as very separate and distinct fields of study, then through coalescence over the years as the study of food systems in society. Within the latter, rural geographers have examined the resource management and environmental aspects of food production and, more recently, have drawn upon economic geography to examine the evolution of commodity chains and producer households/enterprises under the influence of globalization (Woods, 2009). They have also drawn on cultural geography to scrutinize the links between producers and consumers (Atkins and Bowler, 2001) as well as consumer attitudes and behaviours in regards to food (Woods, 2009). The shift to an interest in food within the agro-food system has helped to move research from a mutually exclusive dualistic approach, one where research on production was separated from research on consumption, to a more integrative approach where linkages and networks throughout the agro-food system are explored (Atkins and Bowler 2001). This has developed into a rich literature that transcends the rural-urban dichotomy and creates strong interdisciplinary linkages among those working on issues of food production and consumption.

An alternative geography of food has grown out of this broader literature to focus on production and consumption occurring outside (or alongside) the mainstream (Maye et al., 2007). Prominent in this alternative food system is a recent trend towards localization. In many regions, this takes the form of a growing interest in food systems that feature shorter supply chains (local procurement and sale) and the increasing prominence of place-specific foods. The growing interest of consumers in 'quality' food has created the opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of (local) farmland in the (local) rural sector. While the central role of food producers and consumers is obvious and unquestioned, the development of a local food system implicates a wider set of actors – some with direct roles in processing, marketing and/or distribution and some with more tangential, yet highly influential, parts to play in the creation of local food-related interest, opportunity and action. This latter set of actors may be seen as facilitators and animators in the local food dynamic, and it is this group that occupies a core element of this thesis. Specifically, the research examines the role of intermediaries in the form of local food organizations in creating opportunities for producers to connect directly with consumers and take advantage of other local market outlets, and the extent and nature of market-mixing among local producers.

This initial chapter sets out the research context and objectives for the thesis and describes the research approach. It also provides an outline for the rest of the thesis, which takes the form of three manuscripts addressing related aspects of the overarching research question and a concluding chapter in which the key findings and contributions of the study as a whole are discussed. The elaboration of research context provides an opportunity to place the thesis as a whole into the geographical and alternative food systems literature. The purpose and objectives serve to frame the research questions that guide the process of inquiry and which shape the three manuscripts. The description of the research approach presents the methods utilized during the research process, including the rationale for using a case study approach and some background on the two regions chosen for the case study. A related section on the organization of the thesis describes how each manuscript contributes to fulfilling the overall research purpose and outlines how each individual research objective is addressed.

1.1 Research Context

Globalization and restructuring have encouraged concentration, specialization and intensification in the food system (Argent, 2002), but there have been other outcomes, and these are receiving increasing attention in the literature. By way of an example, the loss of place through the imposition of modernist globalizing structures results in a territorial push-back described by first by Winter (2003) and by Hinrichs (2003) as 'defensive localism'. Large-scale industrial 'placeless' agriculture unleashes a desire for 'food with a face' or rather food supply-chains with a regional identity that are embedded within social connections, familiarity, and ecological foodsheds (Hinrichs, 2000; Morris and Buller, 2003; Sage, 2003; Winter, 2003; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2004).

The co-existence of conventional and alternative food systems results in a differentiated food system that is hard to define at a national or even regional level. It has been assumed that these two systems have been progressing simultaneously, but in separate spheres from one another, in the same way that local and global processes have been identified separately (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Empirical research on local and farm-level development trajectories indicates a different reality. Essex, et al., (2005) contend that at the local level alternative food networks are connected to broader, more conventional systems of production. Consequently, the logic of separating development trajectories and causes of change in the agricultural and rural sectors is giving way to more integrated forms of inquiry. As McCarthy (2006: 809) notes, "A fundamental tension is evident between the desire for these alternative rural economic networks to enter into, influence, and even redefine the conventional – i.e., 'mainstreaming' strategies – and the desire to have them maintain positions of ontological purity, however small, local, or marginal."

McCarthy (2006: 804) also describes how descriptions of 'alternative' economies very often share common traits and descriptors to those of rural space, “It is not surprising, then, that rural space, products, and identities – along with their close cousins, the local – seem to play such prominent roles in the imagination and creation of alternative economies...” Direct marketing strategies such as CSAs and farmers’ markets are the so-called ‘poster child’ for local food systems, but not all producers can make these forms of distribution work. Many producers rely on even shorter supply-chains, resorting to marketing that emphasizes the unique qualities of their product and turning to a distribution systems that take place through the internet, a producer cooperative, or even retail spaces right on the farm.

Rural geographers have tended to portray the alternative food economy as what it is not, as oppositional to the conventional system of production (Maye et al., 2007; Jarosz, 2008). This overlooks the fact that most actors in the alternative food economy are also part of the larger, conventional system of production, such that many of the approaches used to date have been unable to bring together the dualistic nature of an alternative-versus-conventional dynamic. Conversely, Woods (2007: 499) argues that, "Globalization processes introduce into rural localities new networks of global interconnectivity, which become threaded through and entangled with existing local assemblages, sometimes acting in concert and sometimes pulling local actors in conflicting directions. ...the experience of globalization changes rural places, but it never eradicates the local.” Each locale has its own individual actors making decisions in reaction to global processes of change within their own context of the local (Arce and Marsden, 1993). As Flynn and Marsden (1995: 1183) explain, “Global processes are translated by actors into local situations, and the translation of those processes will vary spatially.” The rural sector is evolving to incorporate an expanding view of the countryside and the role of agriculture in it.

This encompasses notions of commodification of the rural landscape, shifting networks of power, and changing demographics (Woods, 2007; 2009).

Alongside (and invigorating) the growing academic debate around local food is often centered on the meaning of local. There is, "... a growing academic realisation that the shape and composition of local food systems are highly amorphous and in need of critical scrutiny (Maye et al., 2007:150)." Empirical research has shown that 'local' has a variety of meanings which are context specific and dynamic. It is unlikely, and not necessarily useful, that participants will agree upon a concrete definition of 'local' for the purposes of research, and perhaps even regulation. In advocacy work, a definition of local is usually based on the needs and goals of the organization (if it is defined at all), with the understanding that not all participants will have the same understanding of that definition.

Within their definition of local food systems, Morris and Buller (2003: 559) describe local food as a closed system "where food is produced, processed, and retailed within a geographically circumscribed area." The last of these components encompasses a variety of direct marketing schemes through which consumers are made aware of the local nature of the product, such as farmers markets, food box schemes, community supported agriculture, and specialty shops (Marsden et al., 2000). Utilizing a different perspective, Feagan (2007) claims that local food systems are a response to the spatial aspects of the sustainable agriculture movement. As evidence of its geographical nature, Feagan provides evidence of five types of respatialization in the literature: shortened food chains, the foodshed concept, use of labels to identify region of origin, a focus on community, and finally, the 'quality turn' where trust and tradition are more important that economics.

Short supply chains are a method of respatializing and localizing that is purported to bring positive benefits to a region or community (Renting et al., 2003; Feagan, 2007). Producers and consumers have both closer spatial and social (and one could argue economic) connections. Spatial aspects of food and production become selling features and indications of a quality turn (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Feagan, 2007). Labelling also works to associate a product with a particular region, embedding the production, quality and market transaction in a particular place, giving value to something because of the region of identity. In Europe this is seen in the form of protected designation of origin (PDO) labels, and in North America it appears in the form of "buy local brands" campaigns promoting various combinations of agricultural heritage, culinary destination attributes and regional economic development priorities. In a similar vein, the concept of foodsheds "reconstructs the geography of food systems by compelling social and political decisions on food to be originated within specific delineated spaces" (Feagan, 2007:26), reflecting the reality that food production is influenced not only by social and political structures, but must also accommodate the ecological structures of the region or place in which it occurs.

Research thus far has explored various meanings of local, the types of local food activities being undertaken, the role of 'local' in creating sustainable or alternative forms of food production and consumption, and the extent to which conventional producers are participating in a local food system. This last point, which has been explored recently by Ilbery and Maye (2006) and Trabalzi (2007), provides the opportunity for local food research to go in a new direction. Trabalzi (2007) discusses the idea of 'dual-market identity' whereby producers supply two distinct markets simultaneously - the industrial system and the local specialty supply-chain. This dual-market identity has been conceived as a form of 'hybrid' food system (Ilbery and Maye, 2006), whereby the local and the global are intermingling not just in a particular place or region, but within individual enterprises. Ilbery and Maye (2006: 355) go on to describe the complexity of a hybrid system: "This mixing together involves a series of vertical and horizontal links upstream and downstream from the producer and different intermediaries, as well as the buying strategies of retailers." Producers utilize a variety of marketing practices in order to capture the most 'value' for their product, often demonstrating through their practice that 'terroir' has more traction in the market than other potential qualities (Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck, 2001; Renting et al., 2003). Understanding why producers are emphasizing the 'local' in order to gain value is clearly related to the media's recent obsession with local food. What is not so clear is who these producers are and why they find mixing markets to be necessary or desirable.

From the consumer perspective, community food security has been respatialized through the relating of food access, security and justice issues to a local community scale, engineering a shift to include community health and social justice advocacy workers in the dialogue and research around local food (Anderson and Cook, 1999; Feagan, 2007). Rural economic development agencies have also come to see local food as a boon to the community because it appears to provide economic benefits for a region, especially in areas where there is a long history of agriculture (Campbell, 1997). Indeed, local food promotion has become a popular project initiative for many levels of government and types of non-governmental organizations in recent years. Local food initiatives, with the assistance of 'local food intermediaries', can at once offer viable opportunities to improve access to healthy food and new marketing strategies for producers. Intermediaries in the local food system are generally either governmental agencies or non-profit organizations working to make and improve connections between producers and consumers (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007; Kovach and Kristof, 2009).

Proponents of local food systems recognize the challenges that producers face and the difficulty in managing both production and marketing. Many organizations have stepped in as intermediaries to provide resources to local producers and, through marketing campaigns, to educate consumers about local food. Most of these organizations decline to emphasise any one particular type of agricultural production, and instead put everything under the umbrella of local (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008). The belief appears to be that a strong consumer base that understands the particular nuances of buying locally, issues around seasonality, variation in quality, and difficulty in finding small-scale processors, can provide producers with a reliable income and will further encourage producer commitment to local markets (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008). A common thread among these organizations is the use the slogan *Buy Local Buy Fresh*, or a variation on it, as a way to brand their message.

Often, organizations such as those promoting local foods do so with limited access to core funding, labour, and sometimes even community acceptance (Eisinger, 2002). Understanding the internal and external forces that affect an organization's capacity to gain and maintain resources is important for assessing the capacity to provide services. The capacity to provide opportunities and support for producers depends on technical, financial, institutional, political and social factors within each region. Further, organizations are constantly evolving as they adapt to the needs of the community, available resources, and the desires of stakeholders. Thus, to understand the challenges faced by local food intermediaries, it is important to go beyond the alternative food systems and rural geography literature to invoke ideas on organizational capacity and lifecycles (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001). These organizations provide the link between consumers who have an interest in local food and producers who are looking for diverse marketing opportunities. Accordingly, knowing the motivations and marketing practices of local food producers will shed light on the ways in which intermediary organizations can engage producers and support them in the growth of the local food industry.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The aim of this research is to critically examine the characteristics and relations of local food organizations (i.e. intermediary organizations) and producers using the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* brand within the geographical context of SouthwesternOntario, Canada. The research focuses on the organizational structure, evolution, and perspectives of two local food organizations who utilize the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* brand, and considers the importance of these local food intermediaries in linking farm and non-farm actors. It also explores the marketing and enterprise strategies of producers participating in the local food initiatives supported by the two organizations.

The three research objectives associated with this study are:

1. to explore how the evolution of local food organizations, acting as intermediaries, influences distinctions in composition, structural characteristics and central purpose, and impacts the ability of organizations to provide services to the local food community, especially producers;
2. to document the diversity of perspectives among local food organizers and producers, and understand the impact of those perspectives on producer engagement with the organization; and
3. to assess local food producer characteristics, strategies and motivations for engaging in the local food economy, and to identify the extent and rationale of market-mixing in local or extended food systems.

1.3 Research Approach

The research undertaken for this thesis was informed by scholarship in qualitative human geography. DeLyser (2010: 6) explains that as human geographers we, "...recognize the complexity of everyday reality, the multitude of influences that shape lived experience, and the importance of the spatial contexts of human interaction." In order to best capture the lived experience and complexity of everyday reality a qualitative approach was chosen. Qualitative research methods require the researcher to be involved at an intimate level. Richards (2009: 69) expands this notion; "Every qualitative method requires that the researcher learns from the data, taking into the next research situation what was learned." Given the types of data needed to fulfill the research objectives, it was determined that a case study would best provide the necessary depth of understanding of the organizations and producers working in the local food economy and would capture the nuance and critical internal dynamics of organizations.

The alternative, macro-scale approach would dilute the regional context and complexity noted earlier to be significant to the understanding of local food systems. A case study, rather than a cross-case approach, is appropriate for examining a few cases intensively instead of examining many cases on a more superficial level (Gerring, 2007). As Feagan (2007: 31) notes, "...regions are seen to be geographic units of both stability and change where internal and external forces are continuously transforming and reinforcing regions in a multitude of ways." He further expands on the importance of regions by quoting Entrikin (1989: 41), "...attachment to place and territory remain of importance to modern society despite the increased mobility of the population and despite the production of standardized landscapes."

A desire to understand how regional context influences both producer and organizational behaviour led to the selection of two distinct regions for the case study. The two study regions were chosen initially because they appeared to have organizations actively working on local food issues; in particular, the organizations were using a *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map project as a way to connect with producers and promote local food. These organizations are two examples among numerous regionally based organizations in the province that act as intermediaries (supporting producers and connecting them with consumers). The common thread among these organizations is a desire to promote the producers and agricultural products of their region by using a branded message to communicate with potential consumers. These organizations range from extremely successful on one end to marginally active on the other. Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW) were chosen as being active organizations with varying degrees of success.

Second, each region displayed strong agricultural histories and similar growing conditions and were geographically proximate to one another. The spatial bounds of the case study were determined by the maps produced by the organizations, which in turn were based on the boundaries of regional administrations. Figure 1.1 shows the boundaries of the two study regions. An in-depth description of each study region is provided in the subsequent chapters and is not replicated here.

Figure 1.1 Huron and Perth Counties and Waterloo Region in Southern Ontario

Three main types of data were collected during the study- via documents, interviews and observation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method in order to generate a substantial amount of qualitative data. According to Seale (1998), semi-structured interviews provide the necessary flexibility that allows the researcher to follow up on interesting leads or ask for clarification. In addition, the inclusion of mostly open-ended questions "... allow(s) a respondent to answer on their own terms, enabling the researcher to discover unexpected things about the way people see a topic" (Seale, 1998: 150).

Deciding who to interview was relatively easy. In the handbook, *Practicing Human Geography* Cloke et al. (2004: 156) state, "Choosing whom to interview involves targeting of people who are likely to have the desired knowledge, experiences, or positioning, and who may be willing to divulge that knowledge to the interviewer." Therefore, respondents were chosen because of their connection to the local food organization, either as a producer listed on the map initiative or as one of the steering committee members. Without the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map that each organization published, it would have been difficult to access the range and diversity of producers necessary for the study.

The interview data were supplemented by attendance at committee meetings and other relevant events, such as a launch event for producers. Each organization also supplied documents that detailed their funding arrangements, strategic plans and promotional material. These documents provided history and context that supplemented the narratives provided in the interviews.

1.3.2 Methods

Field work, including observing committee meetings and conducting interviews, took place between the summer of 2007 and the fall of 2008. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a conversational style and guided by the questions detailed in Appendices 1 and 2. Respondents were contacted via telephone to schedule and obtain consent to conduct an interview. Interviews with steering committee members (local food intermediaries) took place in a range of locations chosen by the interviewees. Generally, they were held in their place of work. In the case of producers, interviews were held either at the site of production or their retail space, with each providing an opportunity to observe the enterprise and gain a fuller understanding of its circumstances. Interviews were tape-recorded, except in the case of eight producers who declined and in the case of two steering committee members when there were technical difficulties. In addition to recording the interviews, notes were taken to supplement transcriptions.

The total number of producers listed on the map initiatives during 2007-08 included 94 producers in Huron-Perth and 72 producers in Waterloo Region. Table 1 shows the response rate for both producers and steering committee members. Of the total 166 producers in the two regions 95 were contacted and 32 agreed to an interview. Repeated attempts to maximize participation were done alongside purposeful sampling to end up with interviews that were representative of the full sample population. Further efforts to maximize participation were curtailed after it became clear that saturation of responses was being reached.

Nearly all of the steering committee members participated in the interviews, with the exception of two members from Foodlink (Waterloo Region) who were unavailable during the period of time in which interviews were conducted. Producers in the study were offered financial compensation (honorarium) in the amount of $25 or assistance with on-farm labour provided by the researcher (maximum of half a day). The offer of on-farm labour was done as a way to build a strong rapport and credibility with the producer and develop further opportunities for conversation and insight. It was decided that the steering committee members would not be compensated because the majority of respondents would be answering questions as part of their professional involvement with the organization.

Table 1.1 Interview Response Rates

Contacted	Interviews Completed	Refusals
95 producers	32	12 outright refusals 51 did not return calls or were never available
20 steering committee members	18	2 were unavailable

Once the interviews were completed, the analysis phase began. The first step in analysis was to transcribe the interviews. Seale (1998: 207) suggests that transcription should be seen as an integral step in analysis; "Though laborious, the experience of transcribing can bring a much closer appreciation of the meanings in the data, and this is often the time at which ideas for coding arise..." Ideas and a better understanding of the full range of content emerge from working with the data. A researcher discovers themes in the data, categorizes the ideas, and from that comes deeper understanding. The second step in the analysis is coding, which in qualitative analysis generally takes three forms (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2009). The first, descriptive coding, is a way of storing the values of specific variables about each case. This type of coding is most like quantitative coding. The second is simply labelling the topic of a segment of text by the subject. An example of this could be a collection of all the responses to one interview question. This is called topic coding. The third type of coding is analytical coding. This is where most interpretation and enquiry occurs in the coding process. The major themes that develop into an explanation are uncovered through the analytical coding process. All three types of coding were used in the analysis of the data. Further details on methods used in the research are included in each manuscript.

1.4 Organization of the Thesis

The remainder of the thesis is divided into four chapters. The first three chapters are comprised of one manuscript per chapter, each appropriate for publication on its own, and yet building upon each other to constitute the entirety of the thesis. In writing each one to stand alone for publication, it is necessary to repeat certain pieces of information with respect to the research approach, background on the study region and case study specifics. Each manuscript is intended to make a contribution to the literature on local food systems and to the broader discipline of rural geography by theorizing and empirically examining the purpose and operation of intermediary local food promotional initiatives.

The first manuscript (Chapter Two) focuses on the work of organizations with explicit 'Buy Local' marketing identities which aim to support local producers and educate the public about local food. The paper explores the differences in mandates and identities of local food organizations in Ontario through the lens of organizational capacity and lifecycle literature. The paper accomplishes this by comparing the history and evolution of two local food organizations located in Southwestern Ontario-Huron Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW). It concludes with a consideration of the potential effectiveness of local food organizations and reflects on the utility of examining organizational capacity through the various lifecycle stages. The manuscript addresses the first research objective and sets the background context for the subsequent papers. This chapter will be submitted in manuscript format to the *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*.

The second manuscript (Chapter Three) examines local food organizations' programmatic focus and their interaction with the public and key stakeholders, especially producers. Since the success of an organization depends on involvement from its key members, and producers are a core constituency of these organizations, success in engaging producers is indicative of long-term survival. Drawing on selected concepts and established notions in the adoption of innovation literature, the importance of the "message" sent to producers in order to encourage engagement with the initiative is assessed. In addition, individual organizers (board/committee members and staff) are asked to share their perspectives on local food, goals and agendas of the organization, and expectations for producers. In turn, producers are asked to share their perspective on their experiences with the organization and their impression of how well the organization is able to meet its goals. This manuscript satisfies the second research objective and bridges the organizational motives presented in the first manuscript with the experiences of the producers presented in the third manuscript. This paper was prepared for the audience of *The Canadian Geographer.*

The third and final manuscript (Chapter Four) privileges the farm side of the local food systems dynamic and draws on producer interviews to a) present the empirical richness of producer strategies for participation in a local food economy and b) identify the extent and rationale of market-mixing/food system mixing in relation to local and extended food systems. The paper begins with an exploration of the reported motives, strategies, and barriers of producers in the local food economy and considers the evidence of 'market –mixing' through a review of the current literature. The paper details the findings from the case study, starting with characterizations of the producers and their wide ranging enterprise models. The strategies and motivations these producers utilize when developing their supply chains or diversification strategies are then considered, along with recognition of the barriers that producers commonly face when developing local markets. The paper concludes with some reflection on the levels of 'market-mixing' and related complexity present among producer enterprise models in local food economies. This final manuscript fulfills the third research objective and was prepared for submission to the journal *Agriculture and Human Values*.

Finally, Chapter 5 offers a description of the key findings and contributions, and presents reflections of the thesis as a whole. It further considers contributions to the broader field of study and offers reflections on the research process. Two appendices at the end of the thesis present the interview guides for producers and organizational members.

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CHAPTER TWO

ORGANIZATIONS AS LOCAL FOOD CULTIVATORS: GROWING TWO INITIATIVES IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

2.1 Abstract

The local food agenda has grown into a social movement that brings together a wide variety of actors and organizations. In recent years, Ontario has experienced a growth in the number and variety of local food promotion groups, especially those using the 'Buy Local' slogan. While these organizations share many common features, they often have distinct origins and experiences that are linked to variations in regional characteristics and organizational lifecycles. This paper explores the evolution of two organizations with similar, but not identical, development histories through the lens of organizational lifecycles and capacity development. To get a better understanding of the narrative and importance of the lifecycle stages, the findings are packaged as an organizational storyline from inception to the present, following two organizations in southern Ontario, Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW). The organizations were chosen for their recent local food activity and the presence of a specific and widely replicated project initiative – a promotional map of local producers.

Data for the two organizations were collected via 18 semi-structured interviews that surveyed the motivations, strategies, and barriers inherent in promoting local food with members of the organizing committee/board of directors for two local food organizations. Four factors were found to have a strong impact on the capacity of an organization over the course of the four stages of lifecycle development: clear and commonly understood goals, strong and visible

leadership with connections to producers and community, available operating funds that keep programs consistent and stable, and support or 'buy-in' from producers and the community.

2.2 Introduction

Fresh, nutritious, and full of flavour! Buy local and support your local farmer! Advertising slogans like these are becoming common-place across Canada and other parts of the world. Consumer attention to the origins and quality of food has grown significantly in recent years and, not surprisingly, the farming community has taken this opportunity to develop new (or perhaps re-establish old) farm enterprise models to meet the demand for fresh, local food of verifiable provenance. Producers are taking advantage of the growing interest in local food by increasing on-farm retail sales, developing relationships with local retailers and restaurants, and developing new products geared toward local market demand (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Starr et al., 2003; Ross, 2006; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007). Consumers are responding to the growing availability and increasing promotion of local food by seeking it out at farmers' markets, specialty retailers, and by connecting directly with producers (Hinrichs, 2000; Smithers et al., 2008). In addition, retailers and restaurants influenced by consumer demand and quality goals are starting to source food directly from local producers.

While the trends noted above are developing 'organically' as a result of the independent actions of numerous actors, on both the producer and consumer side, they are also being propelled forward through the establishment of municipal or regional organizations with a focus on local food. Such ventures range in size, complexity and purpose and arise from developments in both the public and private sectors. Taken together, and in general, they commonly seek to act as a visible focal point and intermediary for advocacy and action in local food, to elevate the public profile of local food and to champion the cause of local producers. Many, particularly those with roots in the public sector, may also be well positioned to serve as a functional point of contact between the local food sector and the wider realm of policy and institutions (Mendes, 2008).

While it is true that, in many cases, local food organizations exhibit multiple purposes or dimensions over time, they have their own particular points of origin – an original raison d'être. They are also often traceable to the efforts of a particular person or small group of people who possessed a shared concern or perceived a similar opportunity. In the realm of local food, the range of concerns or interests is large, spanning public health, rural/regional development, farm enterprise viability, food sovereignty, alternative (or politicized) consumption, environmental quality, and beyond. Local food champions emerge from all walks of life and include so-called food systems insiders (those with a direct or professional role in the food system) and/ or members of the community at large. Whether or not these original catalysts (both ideas and individuals) define organizational identity in any strong and sustained way- and whether these beginnings produce fundamentally different trajectories of development – has not been widely studied.

Post formation, regardless of their initial rationale, local food initiatives, like all social/organizational structures, evolve, expand, and develop the capacity to act- or don't. Here it is possible to see tensions between complexity and coherence where increasing levels of the former often works to the detriment of the latter. Beyond the interest in the identity forming elements of local food initiatives, there is both scholarly and practical interest in understanding the dynamics of organizational development and change in order to interpret, and perhaps influence, the performance of local food initiatives – particularly those present in the public or community sectors.

In Ontario, the phenomenon of the local food organization is well exhibited in the creation of a large number of municipally and regionally-based local food promotion initiatives. A reconnaissance-level examination of these ventures reveals some common features in their architecture and language: mandate to promote local, volunteer run or very small staff, use of the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* slogan, etc. However, it is also known that differences exist in their origin, core purposes and, presumably, their capacity to act as intermediaries between consumers and producers. As suggested above, such differences may be important in understanding both the development trajectory and effectiveness of specific initiatives in general, and also in assessing their success in mobilizing a critically important player in local food systems- the producers. Many of these important distinctions are not visible from a high level and require closer, more detailed, scrutiny from the "inside" via hands-on engagement with individual initiatives.

This paper seeks to reveal and understand some of the reasons for, and consequences of, organizational distinctions in composition and mandate. This paper explores the emergence and activities of two organizations with similar, but not identical, development histories through the lens of organizational lifecycles and capacity development. The two organizations, Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW), are public and quasi-public intermediary organizations, with explicit 'Buy Local' marketing identities that are distinct from the genre of "producer/product-driven" ventures (the latter reflected in the self directed enterprise based promotion of specific farms or products). To get a better understanding of the narrative and importance of the lifecycle stages, the findings are packaged as an organizational storyline from inception to the present. Especially important in the history of the organizations, are the evolution of motivations, goals, and achievements that mark the various stages of development. The unique arrangement and relationship between these two organizations allows for insight on how their development has converged in several places, but diverged at other points, often guided by the key people involved, funding available, and demands or engagement of their various stakeholders.

The paper begins with a general overview of growth of local food organizations in North America and the context in which they operate. It further provides a brief synthesis of organizational capacity literature and its potential application to local food organizations when viewed through the lens of organizational lifecycle stages and organizational capacity. The second part of the paper turns to the empirical analysis and explores, in both broad and more place-specific terms, the 'multiple mandates and identities' of local food organizations in Ontario. Following a brief overview of the research approach and data sources, the paper moves to explore evidence at two levels of resolution. By establishing a wider context for the selected case exemplars, the paper presents impressions from a reconnaissance-level exploration of known (self identifying) local food promotional ventures in Ontario. The main part of the analysis, however, concerns the evolution and nature of the two case initiatives: HPFTTN and FLW. Findings are presented via an organizational life history that traces and interprets the evolution of each organization from inception to its current status. The paper concludes with a consideration of the utility of examining organizational capacity through the various lifecycle stages.

2.3 Organizational Diversity: Variety in the Form and Function of Local Food Organizations

The case for local food has its roots in the alternative agriculture ideology, but goes beyond that to offer promises of healthy and flavourful food in addition to socio-economic and environmental benefits. Social movements have long been catalysts for change within the larger structures of power, and in this case the alternative food movement is a primary example of change coming from the ground up (Buttel, 1997; Hassanein, 2003). "The alternative agro-food movement- as a kind of new social movement – is dynamic and multi-dimensional, involving various groups of people situated in particular places, who create and implement assorted strategies, participate in diverse forms of action, and encounter a variety of obstacles and opportunities (Hassanein, 2003)." Within this broader push for change, local organizations are capitalizing on the malleability of 'local' as a way to make progress in their region and garner support from a wider array of stakeholders than was previously possible in the sustainable food movement. These organizations define and value local food in ways that reach out to a broader community - a community that is defined and calibrated in a variety of ways according to the roles and goals of the organization.

Ostrom (2006: 66) argues that, "local food has become the unifying theme of a social movement to challenge and reshape the modern agri-food system with 'local' coming to signify all that is believed to be the antithesis of a globally organized system...." Local may in fact be a unifying theme, but many authors have pointed out that the meaning of local is varied and difficult to define in present terms (Allen et al., 2003; Ostrom, 2006) which makes the 'unifying theme' dependent on geographical context and social actors' involvement. In effect, as Ostrom (2006) points out, local food has become *the* argument for changing the current agri-food system and an effective banner under which to collect groups of varying interests to work for a common goal.

Alongside the growing body of academic literature devoted to exploring localized food systems (Hinrichs, 2003; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005; Ostrom, 2006; Allen and Hinrichs, 2007; Feagan, 2007; Mendes, 2008) there is a growing movement by local organizations and institutions to encourage the growth of local food systems or economies. The 'Buy Local' approach has emerged as useful shorthand for organizational purpose and a first point of entry for many organizations as they get involved with the promotion of local food. Funders have something concrete to support and it is a salient topic for community members to get behind (Ostrom, 2006). The history of 'Buy Local' campaigns, as detailed by Hinrichs and Allen (2008), demonstrates how important marketing and promotion are to the success of these programs. In addition, the fact that an organization can capitalize on the broadly recognized and understood message of *Buy Local Buy Fresh* and still adapt the campaign to regional idiosyncrasies has led to the widespread use of the slogan across North America (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008).

Allen and Hinrichs (2007) completed a broad study of Buy Local Food campaigns in the United States, as a way to explore 'alternativeness' in the local food movement. One of the things they found in relation to this paper is that the objectives of organizations in their study did not necessarily match the promotional messages they used to promote local food. For example, the authors found that economic support (for producers and local food businesses) was the prevailing programmatic objective, while taste was the most common marketing message. As suggested by the authors, the discrepancy is related to the different motivations that producers and consumers have for engaging with the local food economy. Organizational objectives require strategic planning while the promotional material is about gaining new consumers through marketing (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007).

While local food organizations can certainly be differentiated from one another at moments *in* time, they also evolve *over* time. Organizational identity is shaped by geographic context, historical legacy, ideology, personalities, and emergent opportunities (and potentially crisis), along with external forces such as market forces, and political will (Allen et al., 2003). As these structures shift and change they not only impact the agenda of each organization, but also the evolution of the organization itself. One way to view local food organizations and initiatives then, is through the lens of organizational life-cycle stages. Quinn and Cameron (1983) suggest that changes in organizations follow predictable patterns or stages of development and the changes occur much more rapidly in new organizations.

Jawahar and McLaughlin (2001) proposed four lifecycle stages and explore the role and importance of various stakeholders in each stage. The four stages as described in Table 2.1 (start-up, emerging, growth, and maturity) require the involvement of different interests or stakeholders who can facilitate movement to the next stage.

Table 2.1 Lifecycle Stages of Development (adapted from Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001)

Lifecycle Stage	Start-up	Emerging	Growth	Maturity
Characteristics	Creativity Flexibility Gathering of resources	Informal structure Human capital dependent Personal commitments	Formalization Setting goals Planning	Engaging stakeholders Growth Stability

The start-up stage is regarded as a period of creativity, flexibility and a gathering of resources. The emerging stage of the lifecycle is characterized by an informal structure and plenty of human capital in the form of passionate members and personal commitments. The growth stage focuses on processes of formalization and strategies in order to set and attain goals, followed closely by the maturity stage which emphasizes a reaching out to outside stakeholders in order to encourage growth and stability. This final stage can incorporate a continuous pattern of growth and levelling off to meet stakeholder needs (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001). At each stage there are important issues to address that are especially challenging for social movement organizations. The first is managing and amalgamating the diversity of ideas and tactics within the organizations (Hassanein, 2003). The second relates to understanding how the social movement is reflected in a particular place. This is important in regards to identifying a communities resources and focusing those resources to achieve a particular goal.

In addition to the descriptive value of the concept of life cycle stages as a way to characterize initiatives at specific points in time, there is reason to think about the conditions that either accelerate or impede progression *through* the organizational life cycle and that aid in meeting both near and long-term goals. It is in this context that the concepts of capacity and effectiveness, core organizational qualities well-developed in the literature, are helpful in understanding this progression as these are thought to increase over time. Attention to both concepts can provide a clearer sense of where organizations are at in their developmental journey and with respect to their goals – and why. Organizational capacity is measured by a set of attributes that help an organization fulfill its objectives or program goals. Although the capacity literature includes a wide range of attributes that can be part of a capacity profile, most have certain commonalities. Eisinger (2002) identified five critical elements present in most of the studies of organizational capacity: 1) available resources 2) effective leadership 3) sufficient and skilled staff 4) a level of institutionalization and 5) linkages or networks of community supports.

It is important to note, though, that an organization's measure of capacity does not necessarily indicate effectiveness, since an organization may have all the necessary elements of capacity but still not sufficiently able to meet the needs of their stakeholders. As Eisinger (2002) suggests, empirical data are needed in order to understand how these elements of capacity actually contribute to organizational effectiveness. Three measures of effectiveness in organizations include 1) goal attainment, 2) resource acquisition, and 3) providing quality services. When looking at these measures in addition to capacity, it becomes clear that stakeholder involvement (whether staff or members), some level of institutional or strategic planning, and external assistance in the form of expertise and funding is essential for organizational success shifts (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Eisinger, 2002; Strichman et al., 2008). In addition, the criteria for determining effectiveness changes and evolves throughout the organizations' development stages or 'lifecycle' (Quinn and Cameron, 1983).

The common themes throughout the capacity and effectiveness literatures seem to imply that the first step in evaluating effectiveness or capacity is determining the lifecycle stage of an organization. One way to do this is: 1) to determine how organizations arrived at their current state by looking at their development history and ability to acquire resources; and 2) by looking at the current structure (or level of institutionalization) and stakeholder and member involvement. As noted previously, recognition of both lifecycle stages and the elements of capacity and effectiveness call attention to the organizations' history, mandates, internal structure, external linkages, and stakeholder involvement, among other considerations.

2.4 Research Approach and Methods

The analysis reported in this paper forms part of a wider study of the nature of mid-level local food initiatives in Ontario and their role in promoting or supporting local food producers. This particular component seeks to identify and address the multi-faceted structure of local food promotional organizations and understand the motivations and challenges in promoting and supporting local food. As a first step in the research a cursory glimpse of self-identifying local food ventures associated with the BLBF (*Buy Local Buy Fresh*) brand were examined in order to form some initial impressions around the breadth of purpose and the ways in which ventures position and communicate themselves. This was undertaken first by exploring the scholarly literature, and then by developing an appreciation for the regional context via examination of available documents organizational reports, web-based sources and through key informant discussions.

The research then turned to the inside view via detailed case studies of two local food organizations. These exemplar cases form the empirical core of this paper. The case study approach provides insight into the deeper motivations and agendas of those involved, capture the diversity in purpose and structure, and, importantly, understand how place and context are reflected in the different stages of organizational development (Gerring, 2007). The organizations were chosen for their recent local food activity and the presence of a specific and widely replicated project initiative – a promotional map of local producers. Data for the two organizations were collected via 18 semi-structured interviews that surveyed the motivations, strategies, and barriers inherent in promoting local food with members of the organizing committee/board of directors for two local food organizations. The data collected from these interviews have the potential to inform the discussion on local food advocacy and contribute to a growing body of literature that explores the role of local food in related social movements.

Interviews were supplemented by direct observation of committee meetings in the case of Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and by subsequent visits with Foodlink Waterloo (FLW) as well as analysis of substantial supporting documents. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed using descriptive and interpretive analysis techniques (Tesch, 1990). A list of relevant thematic codes was developed by reviewing each interview transcript to identify important themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data segments that indicated common attributes were used to refine thematic codes and develop new codes. Each salient segment of data was assigned a code and compared across transcripts to identify similarities and differences (Tesch, 1990; Patton, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The frequency of responses in each coded category was identified and will be discussed in further detail.

2.5 A View of Local Food Promotional Intermediaries at the Provincial Scale

Ontario has a long agricultural history, with both large-scale industrial production and direct local markets, and each region within Ontario exhibits distinctive types and patterns of production. With some of the best quality farmland in Canada, southern Ontario has a particularly diverse range of products grown from large scale corn, soybeans, and livestock to grapes and apples and an array of vegetables (Statistics Canada, 2006). The Southwestern region of Ontario has seen a slow, but steady increase in the availability of local food and related organizations and businesses in recent years. Two separate polls in Ontario (2006 Ipsos-Reid and 2007 Environics) showed that a majority of consumers were interested in purchasing locally grown food and at least half of those polled reported doing so on a weekly basis (Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, 2007). Further, a study completed by Ontario Farm Fresh (2009) stated that there are over 750 on-farm markets generating roughly $210 million dollars a year in farms sales. The growth of local food has not occurred without some encouragement. In a study by the Metcalf Foundation (Campsi, 2008) it was noted that hundreds of individuals are working on local food issues in Ontario and local food is now a mainstay in the local media, scholarly work, and local government dialogue.

In Ontario, and elsewhere, the spectrum of local food actors and interests runs the gamut from umbrella organizations that focus on networking and policy-level change (e.g. FoodNet Ontario, Sustain Ontario, Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance), to community-based organizations (e.g. FoodShare, Hamilton Eat Local, Just Food Ottawa, Guelph Wellington Local Food) that focus on promoting awareness and access to local food. Within that broad spectrum of intermediary organizations, each can be characterized by their mandates as well as their organizational differences. Even a cursory review of intermediary organizations reveals a diverse set of programmatic purposes and agendas. For purposes of this research, a reconnaissance-level web-based search was completed to confirm the general breadth and character of the local food initiatives in Ontario. Some of the umbrella organizations work to coordinate a variety of regional initiatives (Canadian Cooperative Association, 2009). Regional organizations are often focused on supporting growth in the local food economy and do so by supporting local producers. It was found that one form of these initiatives is largely comprised of promotional campaigns that emphasize buying local products and encourage consciousness building. These campaigns are often initiatives coming out of government agencies or non-profit organizations with a food and agriculture focus (i.e. healthy eating and economic development).

Frequently, a combination of county-level tourism, community health, and farming organizations work together to produce a directory or map of local food sources, and/or host festivals and other food –related tourist activities. In some cases, these initiatives have grown into an organization or network that is broader in purpose and designed to promote and facilitate local food linkages in regional settings. While many of these initiatives are part of a network or larger institution, each manages to retain their own individual approach relative to their region or stakeholder needs. Hassanein (2003) rationalized that having a variety of organizations working on the same issues from different angles achieved greater movement. This allows an organization to focus its resources on one goal or program, while leaving other related goals to another organization. The challenge is making sure that competing interests working for the same general purpose can come to a point of agreement or at least a peaceful coexistence.

For many organizations, their primary goal is to identify and publicize local food producers as a service to both the producers and those consumers wishing to find them. It appears that these organizations typically develop projects that include local food promotion and many go as far as including projects that support business development and distribution. Generally, this comes in the form of marketing services, consulting on business development, or facilitating linkages with market outlets such as restaurants and retailers. The most common manifestation of this effort is the production of a wide array of local food maps across many Ontario regions. The organization of local food events and festivals emerges as a second common activity. The *Buy Local* message is particularly salient because it reaches across political agendas and goes beyond philosophies underlying various production methods. Institutions tend to define ‘local’ based on the needs and goals of their organization (Ricketts et al., 2006), which can lead to competing interests vying for control of the meaning of ‘local’. Buying food locally means to support your neighbour, your local community, and local economy. For this reason, initiatives that come together around local food can find support in a variety of sources and forms (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007). One of the common ways of introducing consumers to sources of local food is through the production of *Buy Local Buy Fresh* maps. The maps are produced by local organizations or committees dedicated to promoting local food. There are currently at least a dozen regions producing local food maps, directories, and websites in the southern portion of Ontario, and several more starting to emerge in the northern regions as well.

2.6 A Story of Two Local Food Initiatives

This part of the analysis follows the development and evolution of two organizations that have a mandate to promote local food and do so in part by utilizing the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* campaign. The organizations are situated in Southwestern Ontario, which comprises a mix of urban and rural communities that stretch between Lake Ontario in the east and Lake Huron in the west. The organizations were chosen in part because they were seen as being active organizations with varying degrees of success and each region displayed strong agricultural histories, similar growing conditions and were geographically proximate to one another.

The first organization is the Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN), a loose network of individuals representing various stakeholders in the region. Huron-Perth is a functional region that contains the counties of Huron and Perth. These counties are composed of primarily rural communities and feature a farm-based settlement pattern. The agricultural system remains dominated by large-scale livestock production and cash cropping, with outputs targeted at the conventional food system, although there has been a growing interest in creating a local food economy. There is also a large tourism industry due to the presence of the Lake Huron shoreline and the well-known Shakespearian Festival in Stratford, the county seat in Perth. The second organization, Foodlink Waterloo, is a non-profit organization run by two staff members and overseen by a board of directors. In contrast to Huron-Perth, Waterloo Region has a large (by Ontario standards) urban centre comprised of three large cities with a surrounding rural region that is characterized by smaller farm sizes and a long history of direct marketing to consumers. Although the region is dominated by urban spaces, the rural character is intact and draws people to the region for the access to farms and local food. The region is well- known as a place to visit Mennonite communities and purchase hand-made crafts and foodstuffs from Mennonite farmers as well as other local producers.

In both case study regions and across other ventures in the province (the latter gleaned from attendance at organizational meetings by the researcher), there is increasing evidence of collaboration between groups – resulting in a broad-level standardization in some aspects of program development and delivery – particularly in relation to local food maps, web lists and branding initiatives. While both organizations began with a ‘healthy eating and community food security’ bent, they gained wider recognition and experienced greater momentum when their efforts were linked more explicitly to two issues of evident widespread public interest: support for local food production and local economic development (the latter with obvious links to employment opportunities in the expanding service sector).

The origins of both organizations are examples of grassroots community-based social movement in action. They each began when a small group of people came together with a common interest and the goal of creating a network that would address food security issues in the community and support local agricultural production. Both of the initiatives began slowly, first with the impetus of a few key actors, and gradually gaining more support and involvement as each project successfully led to another. The nature and intent of the network evolved as opportunity and funding became available and as new members became involved. At each new stage of development, the goals, motivations, and involvement shifted so that new ones emerged and others took on a less important role or even faded away altogether.

In the following synopsis, attention is given to the progression of the development of each organization and the relationship between the steering committee members' motivations and the organizations' achievements. Subsequently, the relationship of the evolving motivations and achievements to the structure of the organizations and the major stages organizational lifecycle development is discussed.

2.6.1 Huron-Perth Field to Table Network

During the start-up phase, the focus of the HPFTN was one of public health and food security. One of the original members was a staff member at the Huron County Health Unit (HCHU) and became involved in Food Secure Canada, which encouraged action on a number of food initiatives that address community food security and access to healthy food. At the same time, health units around the province were shifting to a service model that focused on social determinants of health, including access to healthy food. The HCHU staff member took the initiative to reach out to other community organizations to start a food security project. HCHU partnered with the Huron Business Development Corporation (HBDC) to apply for funding in

2000, which would support a coordinator to develop the Good Food Box (GFB) program in Huron County (the GFB is a program started by Foodshare in Toronto, see Johnston and Baker, 2005). Members of these two organizations had partnered on previous initiatives and decided that they could each provide a different element to the funding application. The member from HCHU brought an interest in health and community food security, while the member from the HBDC brought an interest in economic development.

One member of the committee describes the initial motivation,

"The Huron County Health Unit had obtained funding through the Rural Development Secretariat. They were looking at issues around food security and sustainability. What came out of it was a desire to establish a Good Food Box program using primarily Huron County produce. That was initiated out of the HCHU. The second was the development of the map of direct farm gate producers. So that started to take on an economic development focus rather than just a health focus so being an economic development agency we were brought in at the time to lend our side of the story."

The result of the initial round of funding was a full-time coordinator for the GFB and the creation of the Huron Field to Table Network (HFTTN). There was also a small brochure created that promoted some of the local producers. The GFB launched in 2001 with six local producers and doubled both consumer and producer involvement in a few short years (Huron County Health Unit, 2004); a key component of this was expanding the human capital of the project. This initial project was successful and led to further funding applications and an expansion of programs. The network started with the receipt of a grant in 2002 which enabled the appointment of a coordinator shared with another project at the health unit. The focus on the coordinator's work was on organizing the Good Food Box program. At this point the original goals, as discerned from documents and related by insiders, were cast as community food security, improved community health and nutrition, more linkages between agriculture and tourism, and the creation new food related business. The first step in achieving these goals was to release the first iteration of a producer guide in 2003.

This also signalled a shift to the second, *emerging* stage of development in the organization's lifecycle. The gathering of people from a variety of agencies and backgrounds built up the necessary human capital for advancement. The HFTTN was created in response to concerns about food security and a perception of under performance in agricultural-related activities such as agri-tourism and agri-food businesses in the region. This network drew the attention of various community members who had previously been working on these issues in relative isolation. The steering committee included volunteer representatives from public health, community economic development, planning and tourism, and producer organizations, all who had some level of interest in making local agriculture more successful and local food more accessible to everyone. Most of them suggested that networking with one another was an important part of what they got out of working on the committee. They were able to bring their expertise to the table and learn about other agency activities on related issues. As an example, one of the members who has had a wide variety of jobs related to food and agriculture shares, *"My bent in life is food security so I did a contract at the health unit for a year around food security and that kind of thing in 2000. I guess it just sort of evolved into this whole map thing and buying local."*

The original network had sought out producers to be involved, but found little interest. At the time of the interviews, two producers had recently been invited to join the committee in order to provide a producer's perspective, but also to encourage more producer involvement overall. Many members had suggested that more producers were needed to encourage other producers to participate and support the project. One member explains why the committee needed to be expanded: *"We are sort of government stacked on the committee."* In order to broaden further the range of interests reflected in the committee, there were suggestions that more people from the food industry such as restaurants, retailers, and farmers market managers should be invited as well. One member suggests, *"Another group that would be beneficial to have would be restaurants that use local products on their menu. I think they could show some insight into this a little bit, a different side to what we have around the table now."*

There were many challenges facing the network, and a major one was obtaining financial and community support. Original funding had all been provincial, and the network was keen to get the County involved because the benefits were primarily about the local County-level community. One member explains how they approached the County Council about cost-sharing a staff position to coordinate the GFB, *"It was never about the position, (funding), but about county council getting involved."* According to one committee member, getting support from the county was difficult at first. They were looking for more support for the GFB program and found little interest for projects that focused on food security, even though the GFB was also focused on using local agricultural products. Eventually, they found that changing the messaging around the project had a significant impact on gaining support, and the flexibility and creativity shown in the process was characteristic of the earlier start-up stages of development – in essence a retreat to an earlier developmental point as a means of moving more sustainably into a subsequent stage.

"We sold it as a "healthy eating is good for the population." For whatever reason that didn't resonate probably because there was a perception that the GFB was mostly organic. Mainstream farmers on County Council said no. Then we tried the poverty angle and the GFB was a quality way to get food. So we have to make it for low-income families buying out. So that didn't go anywhere. Then we said it is economic development and the revenues go back to the farmer. You are staffing the other sectors so this is a good opportunity to staff the agriculture sector. Then they viewed it a subsidizing someone, either the consumer or the farmer."

The County eventually did provide support when multiple agendas were expressed and it was made clear that it was benefitting a wider cross-section of the community.

In 2004, the HFTN joined efforts with several agencies in Perth County in order to capitalize on the International Plowing Match, (a major annual provincial agricultural trade show and exhibition) held in September 2005, another demonstration that the organization was, in reality, caught between its start-up and emerging growth phases as aspects of both were present. They wanted to raise awareness of locally produced food and increase linkages with agri-food and tourism. Again, the main focus remained on community health, food security and economic development, primarily beyond the farm-gate. As one member describes, *"The goals are to promote local farmers and encourage local eating, which is essentially economic development, while also promoting healthy eating and community involvement through volunteering."*

This collaborative effort resulted in a map of local producers titled *Tastes of Perth and Huron* and a community event called *Flavours of Huron Perth*. At the end of the 2004-2005 funding cycle, the volunteer committee had secured enough support to keep the GFB going, but the other projects became lower priority as members turned their energy and focus to work within their respective organizations. In 2007, the committee began organizing themselves for another printing of the producer map. By this time several other organizations within the province had created similar producer maps. The committee had some difficulty securing funding for the map because many funders no longer saw map projects as innovative and were reluctant to support them. Most funders wanted to see additional elements to make the project go beyond a printed map and include a plan for making the maps more self-sufficient. In the end, the committee was able to piecemeal together several small grants to cover the costs of printing. In many ways the organization had slipped back into a start-up phase again.

The production of a new map led to more producer involvement in the committee and subsequently a more concentrated focus on supporting local producers. The goals of food security and health promotion were reframed as secondary benefits, while the economic benefits of increasing producer opportunities took a more important role. Meanwhile, FLW, with a popular and successful map initiative in a neighbouring region, began to sell their "branded" concept of *Buy Local Buy Fresh*. FLW was in the process of actively recruiting and organizing similar producer map projects to join forces to carry forward a common concept and to share resources and knowledge. This was an interesting development as many of these projects competed for similar funding. A convergence of ideas was initiated. HPFTTN was able to learn about a successful program that had grown from a similar beginning into something stable and, on at least some measure, more successful. They were also able to license the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* "brand" for a small fee. This began a shift into the third stage of development, the growth phase. The committee subsequently spent the next few years obtaining enough funds to grow the project into a similar set of programs complete with additional staff, website development, and regular map production, as well as more programs aimed at supporting producers.

Although there was diversity in purported goals, most members believed the network was meeting the short-term "instrumental" goals they had set (namely putting out a map), but many felt that more could and should be done. In discussions with members of the HPFTTN committee about broader goals for the initiative, three major (hierarchical) themes became evident. Promoting and increasing awareness of local food was the top priority for most committee members. Increasing opportunities for local producers and encouraging economic development was a close second, and the third was creating a sense of community around local food and increasing connections between producers and consumers (end consumers as well as retailers and restaurants). A founding member of the committee summarized the overall intent,

"a promotion and awareness of local food, local producers, local farming in general. It is bringing the local consumers together with the local producers. It has an explicit role to connect the local consumer with the local producer."

Most members wanted to increase the visibility of the initiative so that both producers and consumers saw them as a resource and advocate on local food issues. As one committee member demonstrates with the following statement,

"I would like to see us become the champions for local food and market-driven farm to table. I think we can do that. I mean I think our network stretches deep enough in to the communities, there is a group of people working together to make thing happen and we are doing it because we think local food can work. In the absence of that sort advocate, it tells me we are that advocate. We need to say that it is more than just a committee now. "

Again, ideas on what should be done in the future differed depending on the background and personal preferences of each member. While the network did attempt to adhere to the loosely understood goals of the network, and the core values of those goals did stay intact to some extent, the projects that had the most potential for funding seemed to dictate the dominance of some goals over others. More clearly defined goals and a process of formalization is needed to move this organization through the growth stage and into the final phase of maturity. While not necessarily a case of "arrested development", there is evidence of an inability to advance at a steady and continuous pace. The importance of this is revisited later in the paper.

2.6.2 Foodlink Waterloo

FLW began in 2000 when several organizations (Region of Waterloo Public Health, the Foodbank of Waterloo Region, and the Community Gardens Network) working independently on food system issues decided that a more structured and collaborative approach would be more effective. The origins of this collaboration began in a similar fashion to the HPFTTN, when a staff member at the local foodbank decided to initiate partnerships for a food security project. After extensive community and stakeholder consultations, they formed three working groups: a buy local group, a food accessibility group, and an urban agriculture group. The original goals of these working groups were community food security, community gardening, and urban-rural linkages. One of the strongest elements of feedback from public consultation was the desire for a strong rural (producer) presence, which resulted in the focus on urban-rural linkages. Most of the committee members were involved because they were interested in some aspects of growing the local food economy, either for professional or personal reasons. Several of the members had been involved right from the beginning and their ideas evolved with the needs and goals of the organization. As one member stated, *"My initial involvement came through food security issues and it just evolved as Foodlink evolved."*

The buy local working group created the first *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map with funding from an external funder, the Agricultural Adaptation Council in 2002. The other two working groups promoted urban agriculture in the form of community gardens and conducted studies on access to healthy and local foods in the region. Many of these studies are used to lobby for support of local food and food security in Ontario and beyond. But as one member pointed out, *"The Buy Local group was the only one that really captured the attention of the community."* The early activities of this organization were characteristic of both the start-up and emerging stages, which allowed the group to move quickly to the process of formalization and the growth stage of development.

Eventually, the local food working group incorporated as a not for profit organization. Initial funding for the start of the organization came from Regional Council (similar to County Council). They used this money to hire an Executive Director in 2003. The organization also began the process of expanding its funding sources and involving more stakeholders. Again, the organization, while firmly planted in the growth stage, was already exhibiting attributes of an organization that had reached maturity.

The driving motivation, drawn from documents and insider recounting, was identified as the local economy and the involvement of both producers and consumers. One member stated the, *"True mandate is to put more local food on more local plates and more dollars in more farmers' pockets."* Several members took this idea a step further to include services such as connecting producers and consumers and helping producers grow their business. The emphasis on farmer-consumer linkages was, and is, framed explicitly in the fact that local agriculture in the Waterloo Region is adjacent to significant urban concentration. A board member explains the overarching goal of connection,

> *"Connect local consumers in urban areas with food that is grown locally by the farming community. We have a number of tools to do that- the map is probably the primary tool, the website and newsletter. A second goal is working with local farmers to help them sustain the business of farming. I think there is an appreciation that we are more than a feel good social movement group. We are really interested in helping farmers generate income for themselves."*

When discussing the importance of local food most members indicated that awareness of local food in the region was of upmost importance because awareness leads to support for local in a variety of ways including purchasing local products, encouraging local government support, and supporting the organizations' initiatives. One of the board members said, *"Foodlink represents a marketing vehicle, a mouthpiece for the value of food. Farmers don't write newspaper articles, they don't appear on TV so Foodlink, as a non-profit, was capable of the* *marketing and linking them with chefs, and other the markets."* A second issue that resonated with the board members was the foundation for community relationships to develop in order to support local farmers and protect the regions' agricultural heritage, *"... the biggest asset is that it is tied to community needs."* Another board member stated, *"Historically, this is an agricultural community and we have excellent soil and it should remain that way and we should keep the city from overflowing onto the farmland."* There were also a number of members who felt that local food was important for food security and sustainability in the region, but most indicated that it was a secondary issue, supported by encouraging the growth of local food.

The first of the formalization activities they accomplished was a classic part of the third stage of development; they went through a strategic planning process to identify how to encourage more rural-urban linkages. Their Executive Director explains how they decided to narrow their focus, *"We went into a strategic planning process and we determined that we could only do so much with limited resources. We decided to focus more on the food systems work, trying to promote local businesses and focus on the local food movement."* The focus of the organization emphasized local farm profitability, food-related business development preservation of rural heritage and farmland, with a smaller, but still present goal of healthy eating.

This work began by printing a second Buy Local map, producing a weekly electronic bulletin, and developing a website. The goals for the organization were centred on 'food localism' with the aim to promote local food and connect rural producers with urban consumers. There was a concerted effort at this stage to make sure there was strong representation from farmers and rural interests. One of the committee members shares how the main goals focus primarily on farmers, *"The main goal is to give awareness and promotion to these producers* *that don't know how to go about doing that and offer them our knowledge to help them with some of this stuff."*

In 2004, FLW received a large Trillium Foundation grant that provided the opportunity to expand their projects. This was followed by a business development plan that clearly separated the organization from the original food security focus. One member explains, *"...as we wrote a business plan in 2005-2006 the focus was on the business development of a local food plan rather than urban food security programming. So we dropped the other programs and have been building a basket of services that would enable us to do that ever since."* They began offering marketing services (for a fee) to producers including the local Mennonite-organized produce auction. FLW also combined promotion with a fundraiser by hosting a local food event that paired up chefs with local producers. Many producers and chefs formed longer-term business partnerships at this event which led to FLW offering their services as facilitators as well. These activities anchored the organization firmly in the fourth phase, the maturity stage of development.

The condensing of the development stages, working a few steps ahead, allowed the organization to move quickly through each stage and reach a level of maturity very rapidly. To avoid the ups and downs of the funding cycles that plague many non-profit organizations, FLW has worked to become self-sufficient. One staff member said, *"Foodlink has purposefully avoided charitable status and we are almost running as a hybrid non-profit and a business. It has been a gradual evolution, but we are focusing more on elements of marketing and consulting."* FLW developed the idea of branding the Buy Local map concept and eventually sold it to regional organizations such as the HPFTTN. The brand is also used in restaurants and retail establishments as a way to identify local products and provide a source of income for FLW. In 2007, Foodlink hired a second staff person and expanded their marketing services available to producers. A major goal for Foodlink is to become financially self –sufficient through fundraising, revenue from events, advertisements on the map, fees for marketing, business consultations, and use of the Buy Local brand. They are also interested in exploring ways to become involved at the provincial level through collaborations with other organizations and through lobbying for policy changes or support.

FLW has managed to provide a multi-layered support system for local food stakeholders in the region by concentrating their resources on one specific focus. They were able to grow and plateau as needed rather than stall or circle back to an earlier stage of development. According to Foodlink's website much of the credit for this goes to the Executive Director, "*Under his leadership, Foodlink has become a grassroots social movement that has broad urban appeal, yet keeps the needs of farms and farm families first and foremost."* All the current board members said that they believed Foodlink had met their stated goals thus far and most said they were exceeding them. Even though they agreed that goals were being met, many were inclined to suggest that the campaign needed to become more financially stable. There other major concern going forward was including more people to become involved, either as volunteers or as producers participating in programs and services.

2.7 Discussion: Converging Ideas and Diverging Approaches

As demonstrated in the previous section, the path through the lifecycle development stages can be fast, linear, and direct, as shown in the case of FLW, or circular and through fits and starts and loop-backs, in the case of HPFTTN. In either case, the stages of development do not have firm boundaries and often overlap. It is clear that while both organizations portrayed in this study have progressed through the start-up and emerging stages and have successfully landed in the growth and maturity stages respectively, the paths they took diverged at several significant points. Much of the underlying differences can be related to the key factors that were identified as important to building a strong initiative, including the presence of a clearly and commonly understood goal(s) or challenge, the ability to coalesce around specific issues given the existence of a myriad of issues, the presence of clear leadership in the form of either formal staff or a core group of continuing group members, the availability of operating funds such that program activities/events/campaigns are regular and sustainable (and widely observable within the community) and buy-in from both a producer and consumer community who genuinely wish to find each other.

Garnering the attention and efforts of multiple stakeholders and decision-makers can be a challenge, especially if that is true within an organization as well as outside it. Having a shared vision encourages its members to work together and is important for maintaining a positive image of the organization (Foster-Fishman et al., 2001), which improves effectiveness in the long run. Often, depending on external pressures (such as funders or grant objectives) the shared vision of the organization shifts (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Strichman et al., 2008). Many local food organizations articulate a broad mandate to improve conditions of food production and consumption, but narrow their focus by taking action on one or two major issues, such as improved marketing or increased access.

Similarly, organizations may share similar ideologies or mandate, but utilize very different approaches for accomplishing goals. One identified strategy local food organizations such as HPFTTN and FLW have undertaken is to not only publicize the existence of local food producers, but also to create momentum for local food such that the organization becomes a catalyst for growth in the roster of local food producers. For HPFTTN, there was a desire for the community to have a better overall understanding of food and agriculture in the region. In a sense, they were suggesting a desire for a general food and agricultural literacy by all members of the community. Individually, the members had a sense of what was important to the region and that more could be done to improve the local food economy, but as a network there was not enough leadership and forward momentum. This was primarily due to a lack of resources, both financial and broader community support.

Strichman, et al. (2008) found that the process of institutionalizing during the development phase can be particularly difficult as the members work to identify their role within the organization. HPFTTN, with a very diverse set of members, has a multitude of goals and agendas to the extent that they are essentially trying to be the all-purpose local food organization. There is still a strong nutritional and food security focus in HPFTTN that clouds some of the other purposes, whereas FLW has adhered to the 'local food is a good economic business model' agenda developed early on in its evolution, and uses other elements of the local food message to 'sell the importance' of local food. Rather than trying to be all things local, FLW is in a sense specializing in the economic impact of local food and uses the social and environmental arguments as a way to gain support. This was clearly defined and set forth in a formal business plan that was created from their strategic planning session, a step that HPFTTN did not take.

FLW was first and foremost about building local food business while HPFTTN is about many things, including access to healthy food, developing a sense of community around local food, and finally about increasing market opportunities for producers. In HPFTTN there were no resources put into directly creating new business opportunities for individual producers in the region, instead broader and more general (but less impactful) programs are the norm. HPFTTN is still continually renegotiating the purpose and direction of the initiative as the members and funding change. Although many of their ideas and programmatic activities have converged with those of FLW (especially in the case of the Buy Local branding initiative) there is still no clear expectation of outcomes. The result is that producers have trouble interpreting the purpose of the initiative and are unsure how the initiative can really work for them. A diversity of purpose is a high ideal, but it comes at the loss of purpose and effective action. The initiative, at least for many years, was unable to evolve into a mature organization fully integrated into the community. This is not for lack of trying, but perhaps an indication of the importance of full support from local government, a strong leadership in the form of a board of directors or a full-time staff member, or the interruptions in funding and forward momentum. In the end, FLW was far more strategic in garnering support from a wide variety of stakeholders and it paid off.

Regardless of how well an organization develops and adheres to a shared vision, little can be accomplished without resources and support. The availability of stable and ongoing funding emerges as a critical determinant of the nature and pace of organization development. While HPFTTN has experienced a variety of successes, particularly in the production of its local food maps, the pace of progress and the ability to expand the scope of activities has been hampered at times by reliance on 'fluid' funding arrangements (including at times an absence of operating funds). An especially poignant example of how both funding and community support can hinder or facilitate organizational development, is the reticence displayed by the Huron County Council when they were approached for funding. The evolution of HPFTTN follows the waves of funding it receives, surging forward with new projects and stakeholders each time new funds are received and stalls or become stagnant each time the funding dries up until someone takes the initiative to start the process again.

FLW, in contrast, has experienced a more sustained pattern of growth that interviewees attributed to the availability of significant and sustained funding and to the (fully funded) presence of full time staff. Allen et al. (2003) conducted a survey of initiatives working on alternative agriculture issues in California and found that over half of the organizations were collaborating with government institutions in order to change policy and provide more programs. Local governments who had previously been uninterested in food and agriculture issues were suddenly providing funding or land for various projects.

Many individuals pointed out that more financial resources and personnel time were needed in order to add additional goals or projects, let alone become the hub for local food resources in the community.

"There are so many things the committee could do and people could commit a lot more time to it, but as you know the people on the committee are already busy people. We have to concentrate on the doable and rewarding ones like the brochure, making connections, the good food box, and the healthy part. If there was more time and resources we could probably take on other things."

In addition to funding, the priorities and initiatives of food groups are reflective of the individuals guiding the project and the 'buy-in' of producers and community members. In both case settings, respondents emphasized that they largely played a facilitating role and that, ultimately, the success of the venture rested on the willingness of local producers to participate and the interest and commitment of consumers to provide ongoing support for local food businesses.

2.8 Conclusion

As organizations continue to foster growth in the local food economy, it is clear that providing support to local producers means reaching out to the broader community and including a breadth of local actors and supporters. Effective and successful organizations in all sectors need stakeholder involvement, deliberate planned action, and financial assistance (Eisinger 2002). Over time, as an organizations' leadership or staff capacity evolves the amount of networking and resource acquisition fluctuates making the capacity of an organization an ever shifting entity. This paper has confirmed the multiplicity of goals in emerging local food organizations and shed light on how these goals, values and self identifiers shift as they move through a series of lifecycle stages toward maturity and stability. The use of lifecycle stages to assess organizational effectiveness has a long history in both for-profit and non-profit ventures. This study applies the concept to two local food organizations in south-west Ontario.

The lifecycle stages provide an interesting perspective on the effectiveness of organizational development. The four stages proposed by Quinn and Cameron (1983) can be identified in the evolution of both FLW and HPFTTN. To some extent it was difficult to draw distinct boundaries around each stage of development as they tended to overlap. In the case of HPFTTN, the early stages overlapped significantly as they displayed plenty of efforts to gather resources (start-up) and informally build human capital (emerging) throughout much of their history. In fact, although on occasion they began to show hints of formalization (hiring staff, etc), it was not until very recently that they began to set goals and create a clear structure. In the case of FLW, the stages overlapped considerably because they tended to move through them quickly, with the greatest length of time spent in the third stage, growth. Clearly, going through each stage is useful and important, but the growth stage (formalization and goal setting) seems to be especially critical for success.

The importance of producer participation in growing a successful local food system cannot be underestimated. Therefore, there is a strong need for evaluating producer motivations when it comes to participation in the local food economy and participation in initiatives specifically geared toward facilitating the growth of the local food economy. Insight into producer motivations would allow for organizations to better understand the needs of producers as well as tailor services and initiatives to better meet their needs. A second area of research that could be a useful next step would be capacity assessment of these initiatives and the organizations that undertake them. The assessment would clarify strengths within the organizations or committee, and areas where improvement is needed. This would help make certain the longevity of these types of initiatives as well as ensure that these initiatives meet the needs of the producers and consumers in the region.

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CHAPTER THREE

LOCAL FOOD INITIATIVES IN ACTION: ESTABLISHING IDENTITY, MOBILIZING PRODUCTION

3.1 Abstract

Local food is on its way to becoming a legitimate innovation in the farm sector, and local food organizations are emerging as proponents of the change. The development of a supporting infrastructure for the local food sector is a work in progress that involves advocacy, promotion, and linkage-building by community or regional-level local food initiatives such as 'Buy Local' organizations. Such groups have emerged as important facilitators and food system intermediaries. These organizations need to gain the confidence of producers and consumers alike. Their success depends on their ability to involve producers and connect with the consumer and community realm.

The paper examines how two local food organizations in southern Ontario, Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW), cast themselves and their role in the local food economy and how they frame producers, both as participants in the organization and as actors in the local food system. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 32 local food producers and 18 members of the organizing committees or staff from HPFFTN and FLW. The participants were asked to reflect on themselves and each other in order to assess the basis for, and prospect of, productive engagement. The reflections given indicate that producers tend to focus on their personal experiences while organizers focus on community experiences. Keeping this in mind, when recruiting producers it is important for organizations to view their initiative as an agricultural innovation that will gain support and interest over time

and the ability to communicate that with producers is key to the long-term success of the organization.

3.2 Introduction

Interest and growth in the local food sector presents the possibility of opening new avenues of food distribution that make it easier and more profitable for smaller scale producers to sell outside the conventional food system. As potential opportunities develop, producers are increasingly looking for ways to shift production to more directly-consumable food products and local markets rather than commodity grains and livestock destined for the conventional food distribution system. For some, the shift to local is seen as part of a larger enterprise-level move to adopt more viable production and marketing practices in the face of declining returns and to be responsive to growing consumer interest in where and how food is grown (Ilbery and Maye, 2006). Producers taking advantage of this growing interest are developing markets that put them in direct contact with consumers (e.g., farmers' markets, farm stores, u-pick operations, internet sales, or CSA models) or shortening their supply-chains by working with restaurants, retailers, or developing other new models of distribution (Starr et al., 2003; Renting et al., 2003; Ross, 2006; Ilbery and Maye, 2006).

Despite the growing interest in local food, and notwithstanding the innovative efforts of producers and producer groups, the necessary infrastructure has been slow to develop. Producers who engage in alternative methods of production and marketing continue to struggle to gain access to resources and support mechanisms similar to the impressive suite of arrangements on both the production and marketing side that underpin the mainstream farm sector and food system. The shift to local carries with it a variety of risks and challenges on many different levels. In particular, producers need help finding efficient and affordable ways to promote themselves and market their outputs. At the same time, consumers attracted to the local food phenomenon need to be able to access farm products in a convenient, cost-competitive and, for some, ‘authentic’ fashion (Hinrichs, 2000; Morris and Buller, 2003; Stephenson and Lev, 2004; Ilbery and Maye, 2006; Smithers et al., 2008).

On the farm side of the local food equation, two families of challenges are apparent – one *internal* to the farm and reflected in the need for new types of knowledge, of both methods and markets, and in the related need to redeploy farm assets, both material and human. The challenges documented in the literature highlight the distinct skills and time commitment typically needed when working in the shorter-supply chains characteristic of the local food sector (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Starr et al., 2003; Ross, 2006). Producers often have difficulty in finding the time and skills necessary to develop local markets, and/or they struggle with finding skilled and affordable labour to assist with this aspect of the enterprise. Other challenges are *external* to the enterprise and relate to competitiveness, market access and consumer awareness. Issues include competition from cheap imports and limited possibilities for economies of scale, difficulties in locating convenient and affordable facilities for processing and transporting to markets, in educating consumers about seasonality and growing conditions, and in changing the purchasing habits of restaurants and retailers (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Ross, 2006; Ostrom, 2006; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007).

As noted above, the development of a supporting infrastructure for the local food sector is a work in progress. One noteworthy development in this regard involves advocacy, promotion and linkage-building by community or regional-level local food initiatives such as ‘Buy Local’ organizations. Such groups have emerged as important facilitators and food system intermediaries (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008). In Ontario, there has been a proliferation of local food advocacy and promotion groups at a variety of scales, displaying different levels of complexity and purpose. In some cases, these groups may be animated by the same goals as individual producers or may instead be oriented around broader societal goals such as health, economic development and food security (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007).

In order to gain the confidence of producers and consumers alike, a basic requirement of these local food organizations is that they possess or develop the capacity to tap into existing production and, ideally, serve as catalysts for growth in the local food sector by fostering the wider participation of both producers and consumers (Ostrom, 2006). It might be assumed that any effort to promote local food is a good thing and that inclined producers and consumers will respond, but in reality there is quite a bit more nuance and complexity in the ability of proponents of local food to grow the producer roster and encourage a shift in consumer choices. In very real ways, such groups seek to act as agricultural change agents, with local food as the innovation they wish to promote. To that end, success depends on their ability to work upstream to reach/involve producers and downstream connect with the consumer and community realm.

This paper is interested in the linkages between the two actor groups mapped in brief above, namely local food groups and the producers they seek to motivate and support. The specific focus is on the relationship between food organization identity, purpose and programmatic action on one hand, and the perception and response of producers on the other. The paper examines how two local food organizations in southern Ontario cast themselves and their role in the local food economy and how they frame producers, both as participants in the organization and as actors in the local food system. Since the success of an organization depends on involvement from its key members, and producers are a core constituency of these organizations, the manner of engaging producers is indicative of the prospect for near-term success and long-term survival. One way to understand how intermediaries such as local food organizations can engage with producers for their mutual benefit is to clarify how these two groups see the burgeoning growth of the local food economy, and perceive one another's role in moving it forward (Smithers et al., 2005).

As noted above, local food may legitimately be seen as an innovation in the farm sector and local food organizations as proponents of change. Recognizing this, the organization of the paper and spirit of the analysis draws selectively on two distinct but related scholarly fields - 'adoption of (agricultural) innovation' and 'sustainable agriculture'. While there is no intention to mount a classically-designed adoption of innovation study, some of the elements of adoption of agricultural innovation scholarship help to anticipate, interpret, and understand the prospect for engagement between producers and local food advocacy groups. Scholarship in sustainable agriculture provides a variety of complementary insights into the nature and effectiveness of relationships between producers and agricultural (food) organizations. Indeed, there is a long history of sustainable agriculture advocacy organizations engaging with producers to bring about changes in the production and marketing of agricultural products. Learning from the successes and challenges of sustainable agriculture organizations is one way to gain insight into the operation and impact of the new wave of local food organizations.

The first two sections of the paper review the role of intermediaries in the local food sector and consider key concepts and propositions from adoption of agricultural innovation and sustainable agriculture literature. These ideas provide a lens through which it is possible to appreciate the complexities of the producer – organization dynamic. A third section presents a case study, moving from the background and history of the selected organizations and description of the research approach and methodology to a presentation of results. The latter begins with organization and producer viewpoints on the importance of the local food sector and then considers how the two groups view one another with respect to their assumptions regarding purpose and the expectations they have of one another. The paper concludes with a brief deliberation on how these perspectives affect the interactions of intermediary local food organizations with producers and the subsequent implications for long-term viability of organizations within the local food system. Recommendations for future research on the role of intermediary organization within local food systems are offered.

3.3 Local Food Initiatives as Intermediaries: Promoting local food innovation

Local food, as both an agricultural innovation and a cultural ‘happening’ may be seen as moving forward incrementally and organically based on the choices of steadily increasing numbers of producers and consumers. As the parties continue to locate each other in the food market place, the sector grows. However, in agriculture, perhaps more so than any other sector of the economy, there is a deeply-entrenched tradition of state and non-state actors playing important and sometimes transformative roles in farm and food system development. Historically, the main forms of formal institutional support have been directed at agri-industrial commodity production rather than diversified small enterprises and this is reflected in a legacy of agricultural supports and subsidies and a corporately consolidated and controlled food processing and distribution system (Grey, 2000; Klonsky, 2000; Atkins and Bowler, 2001).

In comparison, producers who choose to market their products in the local food sector have limited resources, especially those related to developing marketing strategies and accessing (or operationalizing) shorter supply chains. It is partly for this reason that a growing number of locally-based local food initiatives have emerged as advocates and intermediaries dedicated to supporting local food economies in general and local food producers in particular. There appear to be several types of such organizational intermediaries including a) governmental or quasi-governmental organizations such as the UK *Countryside Agency's Eat the View* scheme, b) non-profit organizations that work on policy-level change such as *Sustain* in both the UK and Ontario and *Farm Folk City Folk* in British Columbia, c) an array of regionally defined groups that are eclectic in purpose and origin and weighted toward small and medium sized producers such as *Just Food Ottawa* and *Grey Bruce Agriculture and Culinary Association* in Ontario.

In the European Union, intermediary actors have tended to fall into the first category, and usually features government officials working in regions where rural designations and the resulting policy maintains support for the local food sector as a mechanism of maintaining or promoting economic development in lagging regions (Kovach and Kristof, 2009). One such example mentioned above, the *Countryside Agency's Eat the View* scheme, is the brainchild of a government agency mandated to promote and protect the rural landscape by providing support to the local producers (Nichol, 2003; Jackson et al., 2006).

Compared with the European Union, in North America there has generally been less explicit involvement to date in public/governmental sponsorship for local food initiatives, either through policy development or direct support. However, there is significant arms-length interest and increasing evidence of an attempt to support the growth of the local food sector through collaboration with locally-based organizations. The Ontario government, for example, is escalating its support and funding for regional marketing strategies, small-scale processing and distribution enterprises, and many other local initiatives (OMAFRA, 2011). Much of this support is channeled through intermediaries in the community. In many cases, the role of intermediary, or 'animator' as it is sometimes called, is played by local activists, go-getters, entrepreneurial individuals or groups, and by non-profit/non-governmental organizations. This is not to say that regional or provincial governments are not involved; in fact, they often play a strong role, but they rarely play the lead role, preferring instead to lend support to others. This is where many of the regional local food initiatives have stepped in, providing support for local producers and local food business owners, especially in marketing and promoting their products to consumers in their region. Recently this has been done by capitalizing on social media and other forms of internet-based communication. Organizations have developed websites, e-newsletters, blogs and searchable business directories. One popular approach is to create a local or regional 'identity' using the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* brand through the development of a map of local producers (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007). These are often supported by advertising fees, listing fees and subventions provided by local food organizations.

As the number of local food advocates increases, and these intermediary organizations begin to develop programs directed at expanding and promoting the local food economy, a moment is created where one might question how producers perceive these groups and their programs. For example, according to a study completed in the state of Washington, farmers indicated that a *Buy Local* campaign could help keep farms viable and encourage consumers to purchase locally grown food (Ostrom, 2006).

While few studies beyond those by Allen and Hinrichs (2008; 2007) have focussed exclusively on organizations promoting local food, there have been a number of studies that have looked at sustainable agriculture organizations and their role in supporting alternative methods of production and distribution (Dobbs et al., 2000; Carnes and Karsten, 2003; Allen et al., 2003). One organization, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), started working on support mechanisms for small to mid-scale producers in 1992. Carnes and Karsten (2003) investigated its guiding philosophies and strategies for success. They observed the importance of marketing and community level advocacy for the success of local food, noting that "...marketing is the lynchpin of farmers' sustainability (Carnes and Karsten, 2003:180)." Early on, the organization decided that in order to support local producers they needed to provide support and training for direct-marketing options and advocate for local food within the community. It also appeared that the organization realized that, "...without broad support from citizens and community leaders, markets for local food would not thrive (Carnes and Karsten: 180)." Some of the strategies the PASA found useful included getting producers involved in the development of the program, utilizing the technical expertise of government officials, and hiring a coordinator familiar with the issues who could work well with all the stakeholders, especially producers. From this literature on sustainable agriculture organizations, it is clear that organizations who wish to work with producers to grow the local food economy need to see producers as an integral part of the organization.

3.3.1 Drawing on Innovation Adoption in Local Food Studies

As previously noted, producers must develop skills to either market their product directly to consumers or to navigate a shorter (and often more hands-on) supply-chain in order to operate in the local food sector. Selling through the local food system can require a shift to new production practices, the introduction of new crop or livestock varieties, and more collaboration with local chefs or processors. The acquisition of the skills associated with local food production and marketing often comes with a steep learning curve and producers may need support in order to make a successful transition (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Schneider, 2005).

The literature on adoption of innovation provides a good basis for understanding how producers make decisions about their business and how willingness to try something new is determined. Adoption of innovation theory has been used to describe adoption of conservation practices, organic production practices, the transfer of new technology and participation in agri-policy programs. Rogers (1995: 11) defines an innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual." Interestingly, this theory has not been drawn upon to date to explain the recent shift towards direct marketing schemes, with the exception of e-marketing (Baer and Brown, 2007). In the case of e-marketing, Baer and Brown (2007) found that farmers who direct market need to learn to evaluate advertising methods and to see the latter as a valuable business tool before adopting a more technological approach. Again, this hints at the additional skills needed to develop direct marketing streams.

Four main attributes or characteristics are often used to assess and explain farmers' decisions to adopt conservation practices or shift their enterprise model. These four attributes include 1) household and personal attributes, 2) biophysical or situational circumstances, 3) qualities of the innovation, and 4) exogenous factors such as information sources and dissemination practices, government policies and social capital (Ilbery 1985; Smithers and Furman, 2003; Knowler and Bradshaw, 2007). A new approach is often taken up by a few early adopters, those motivated to experiment or pushed to try something new by a set-back in their current set-up. Often, the new model will then slowly gain tractability as the early adopters begin to have success (Ilbery, 1985). The qualities of the innovation itself can influence decision-makers, such as the advantages or benefits immediately visible to prospective adopters, the compatibility of the innovation to the rest of the enterprise, and how easily it is adopted and communicated amongst producers (Rogers 1995; Smithers and Furman, 2003). The challenge for organizations working with producers is to make sure that the success of early adopters is widely acknowledged, the benefits of the innovation are understood, and both are communicated in the right way.

A variety of exogenous factors are particularly relevant in understanding how producers view both innovations and the organizations that promote them. These include the use of dissemination strategies and change agents, which are often discussed with reference to extension services, the role of social capital, such as memberships in an organization, peer-to-peer learning, and the presence of a change agent. Guerin and Guerin (1994) emphasize the importance of communication and understanding of social environment when the adoption of an innovation is being encouraged. Farmers are more receptive to ideas when the information is communicated face-to-face, encouraged by strong community leaders, and proven successful by early adopters. Social capital has been shown to have positive impacts on acceptance of new innovations. For instance, producers are more likely to stick with the innovation when a change agent maintains regular contact and is available to assist with difficulties in transition and maintenance processes. Successful interactions between the change agent and the adopter is dependent upon factors such as credibility and effort on the part of the change agent to make information available, relevant and personal, and to assist in problem solving and working with local leaders. On a broader scale, the importance of the 'diffusion agency', which can include government organizations, businesses and non-profit organizations, was articulated by Brown (1981), who drew particular attention to the agencies that deliver innovative ideas and the strategies they use to promote the innovations as key components of success.

As noted earlier, local food can be seen as an agricultural innovation, an opportunity for producers to shift their enterprise and try new avenues of marketing and production, and there are numerous (intermediary) organizations encouraging the uptake of local sales in the same way that conservation strategies were 'sold' to farmers in the past. Many intermediaries are actively working to attract more producers to local food in order to build a broad base of support. Producer participation is essential for achieving overall goals and reaching a broader audience. With this in mind, the concepts found in the adoption of innovation literature provide a useful basis for understanding producer and organization interactions.

3.4 The Case Study: Linking Local Food Initiatives and the Producer Roster in Southern Ontario

In order to probe the dynamics between local food organizations and their proximate producer community, data are drawn from recent case studies of two local food initiatives in southern Ontario. This particular analysis is one piece of a broader study of the development and evolution of local food organizations and the producers who engage with them. These two organizations in particular stand out as early adopters of two, now important elements of the local food movement in Ontario, the *Buy Local Buy Fresh (BLBF)* concept (and label) and the strategy to brand local producers as a de facto commodity in their own right. The study region in which the two initiatives are located has a long agricultural history and a social geography that ranges from largely rural farm-based communities in the western portion, to a more urbanized character, complete with three major cities, in the east. In the west, the counties of Huron and Perth have joined forces to form the local food organization, Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN). This two-county region is characterized by large-scale livestock production and cash-cropping activities that are strongly embedded in the major commodity markets and mainstream food system. In the east, the region of Waterloo has created a local food organization, Foodlink Waterloo (FLW). The urban core of this region is surrounded by a rural landscape dominated by smaller farms (many of them Old Order Mennonite), and has a long history of direct marketing to consumers.

3.4.1 The Dynamics of Organization - Producer Engagement

FLW and HPFTTN differ in their history, geography and organizational architecture, but are similar in that they both evolved away from an initial focus on food security to work more generally on providing support and programs for local food producers. HPFTTN is a network of individuals which represents various stakeholders in the region, including members of non-profit community organizations and representatives of producer-based organizations and local government staff members. HPFTTN was organized in 2001 and runs two major projects. The first is a Good Food Box (GFB) program (along the lines of the program started by Foodshare in Toronto, see Johnston and Baker (2005) that focuses on sourcing products from local farmers and providing low-income households access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. The second project is a *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map directory of local food outlets in the region. The organization reached out to hundreds of producers deemed potentially to be a good fit for the two projects. This was primarily accomplished through mailings and phone calls that imparted information about the programs and how to become involved. In addition, several members used their personal contacts with producers in the region to reach out and connect to them on a personal basis, and in the case of producers from the Mennonite community, they often arranged for personal visits to the farm to invite participation. In an attempt to foster cooperation and collaboration with the local food economy, the organization also hosted an event for all the producers listed on the map network to meet one another.

FLW is a not-for-profit organization run by two staff members and overseen by a board of directors comprised of a mix of community members, local business owners, representatives of community organizations and consumers and marketing advisors. FLW began in 2000 and has evolved to include a full portfolio of services for local producers. The core program is the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map directory and associated searchable website. FLW emphasizes the use of a regional brand to identify retailers, restaurants and wholesalers who use products from producers who are participating in their programs.

FLW initiated contact with producers in much the same way as HPFTTN; they sent out letters, made phone calls and visited farms. The organization did have an advantage in that it had paid staff who could put a significant amount of effort into recruiting and building a rapport with local producers. One of the most popular services provided was the yearly event, *Taste Local Taste Fresh*, which paired local producers with local chefs for a fundraiser dinner. The pairings often resulted in long-term business partnerships and new opportunities. FLW also provides custom marketing and consulting services to producers for a low fee.

3.4.2 Data and Analysis

The empirical focus of the case study is on the perspectives and attitudes of both the organizations and their local producers. In effect, the research design asked people on both the food organization and producer side to reflect on themselves and each other in order to assess the basis for, and prospect of, productive engagement. Such information points to possible threads of convergence and divergence that may be valuable in understanding, and perhaps managing, future development at the local scale and beyond.

Staff and organizing members control the direction, reach and tone of promotional material and programs. While an organization may have an official high-level mandate or vision, such entities are ultimately an amalgam of individuals with personal and/or affiliation-based viewpoints. The personal interests of the organizers can influence the how that vision is implemented. As Allen et al.,(2003: 68) state, " Discovering how people working in these organizations view the world and how they see their place in challenging and reshaping the agrifood system is an essential step for better understanding the role of these organizations in social change." For this reason, board members, committee members and staff from each initiative were asked to describe how they felt about local food systems in general, and the vision they had for their respective organizations. Because producers are so important to these the success of these particular organizations, the organizers and staff were also asked about the expectations they had for producer involvement.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 32 local food producers and 18 members of the organizing committees or staff from HPFFTN and FLW. The list of potential producers was drawn from the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* maps produced by each organization where producers self-identify as members of each initiative. Interviews were conducted on the farm or at the site of the retail outlet and included a period of direct observation. Originally, it was anticipated that the producers would all be farmers, but upon closer examination of the map directories it was discovered that a large number of the listings included artisanal food producers, small-scale processors and abattoirs. Therefore, a diverse range of participants were interviewed, including large and small-scale producers with a wide variety of food products.

Most of the producers had been selling some product in a local market for over a decade while the rest had been slowly transitioning into local markets. The majority of the producers were deriving at least half if not more of their household income from their food enterprise. Producers sold via a variety of market outlets, both direct to consumers, through retailers and restaurants, and some through wholesale or even export markets.

Interviews with staff and organization members were supplemented by substantial supporting documents provided by each organization and through direct observation of committee meetings in the case of HPFTTN and by additional discussions with staff in the case of FLW. The semi-structured interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded according to the methods described by Tesch (1990). Responses were coded thematically based on the use of key words (or words with similar meaning) selected during an initial reading of the literature and organizational documents (Patton, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The opinions of both the organizing committee members and producers are portrayed below. The organizers share how they view local food systems in general, what they believe are the main goals or mandate of their respective organizations, their expectations for producer involvement and finally the challenges they face in making the organization a success. The producers share their experiences of participating in the various programs offered by their respective organization, their thoughts on the organization's mandate or goals, and the benefits they gained from being involved in the various initiatives.

3.5 Perspectives on Local Food

'Organizers' (members of board/committee and staff members) and producers of the two local food initiatives held strong opinions about the importance of local food in rural economies, the survival of farming and agriculture, and to the health of people and the environment. An analysis of the major themes discussed throughout the interviews revealed eight major reasons that organizers felt local was important (and many thought that more than one issue was critically important). As shown in Table 3.1, the responses from organizers (n=18) focused mostly on various aspects of the promotion of local food and agriculture and its relationship to human and environmental health.

Table 3.1 Organizers' opinion on the importance of local food

What is the importance of a local food system?	**Number of times discussed**
Increasing awareness of food and agriculture (where food comes from)	9
Improving or protecting human and environmental health	8
Issues of sustainability	6
Economic development	5
Food security and reduced dependence on imports	5
Increasing or protecting incomes for local producers	5
Building community and relationships	4
Protecting farmland and rural heritage	4

The most common response related to the importance of local food was the importance of increasing consumer knowledge of where food is coming from and human or environmental health. There was also concern that the importance of Canadian agriculture in general is not recognized as a valuable commodity. Many of the organizers felt that the potential consumer base needed to first pay attention to where their food originates and how it is grown. The following sentiment is one example of many discussions along these lines, *"In Canada, we have been very fortunate to have a wide array of foods available all the time, but we have absolutely no idea where it comes from. We have this agricultural ignorance around the food we are actually putting in our mouths. People don't understand where it is coming from. They don't* *get that the rules are very different in China. I think we have excellent product locally and that needs to be recognized.”*

Organizers see local food as a way to accomplish many community goals with one overarching initiative. One committee member explained, *“…it marries together tourism and agriculture, highlights good nutrition locally.”* Another organizer stated, *“Historically, this is an agricultural community and we have excellent soil and it should remain that way and we should keep the city from overflowing onto the farmland.”* The following response was typical of organizer sentiment about the multiple benefits of local food, *“and then it has all sorts of secondary benefits around food quality, health, public awareness and relationships with the grower” and “sustainability of the food system, health and well-being of the consumers, reducing the carbon footprint, and aiding the education of consumers about local food.”*

Producers held many of the same views, but they tended to express them in personal terms. One producer shared her views of the multiplicity of local food, *“I want people to see the connection to health and farming, cooking, etc. We could have food experiences just the same as wine- why are we not doing it? I prefer to have people pick up the product because I want them to see the farm.”* Another described how the local food movement protects their livelihood, “*It is important for family farmers to continue and not become a thing of the past, and for farmers to get paid fairly for what they provide.”* Producers also indicated that local food generated benefits for both producers and consumers and gives producers more control, “*If you have a narrow food system it improves quality. It is easier for welfare, environmental issues, tracking, etc. Customers can rely on products and we stand by it.”*

Overall, producers and organizers shared the sentiment that local food was a ‘win-win’ for everyone involved. Producers wanted to make an honest living while sharing what they feel is a good quality product and an economic model that benefits themselves as well as consumers. Organizers had grander visions of protecting community health, economy and environment. This response is unsurprising given that the organizers have a vested interest in supporting local producers while also providing wider social benefits. Below, organizers' views on the role of their respective organizations and their relationship to the producers are probed. This is followed by a complementary depiction of the producers' view of the organizations and their relationship with them.

3.5.1 Organizer Perspectives on Engaging Producers

In general, organizers felt that their respective initiatives represented a way for producers to make connections with consumers by providing them with a resource for marketing their products and local food in general. Table 3.2 summarizes the organizing committee responses (n=18), regarding the broad reaching community-level changes they would like to see as a result of their organization's work.

Table 3.2 Organizational goals from the perspective of the organizing committee

What are the main goals of the organization?	**Number of times discussed**
Promotion and Awareness	10
Increasing opportunities for producers	10
Connecting consumers with consumers, retailers, restaurants, etc	7
Economic Development	6
Increasing availability and access to fresh healthy food	6
Creating community	4
Food security	3
Making local food accessible to consumers	3
Be a resource for community on local food issues	3

The organizers placed considerable emphasis on increasing awareness of local foods in the region and on enhancing opportunities for producers to sell local products. In addition, organizers wanted to see a variety of ancillary benefits for their respective communities, such as economic development, accessible food and a greater sense of community. While the two organizations shared many goals and ideals for their community, there were some differences.

The relative newness of HPFTTN in comparison to FLW meant that many producers were unaware of the organization and its projects. There was much hope that as the organization grew, both producers and consumers would see HPFTTN as a resource and a forum for networking and building. *"I would like them [producers and consumers] to see the organization as the go to resource in the two counties. Right now we are not so much working in a vacuum, but I really think we are task focused. Yes, they saw the map, but I don't think they realized there was an actual group behind the map."* Another organizer voiced some scepticism as to whether their efforts were recognized by producers, *"I suspect that at best we are well-meaning bureaucrats that want to help them out and sometimes we get it right. My experience in dealing with the traditional farm sector-they think we are dabblers."* Other members suggested that there was a hesitancy to become involved because producers did not understand the role of some of the organizers, "*They [producers] just thought it was some map –they didn't really understand the concept of what it is all about and I would hope that this time around it will be much more noticeable that there is a committee and a group and we are trying to work for the goal for everyone the same."* There was a sense that some producers would be hesitant to participate until they knew the project would benefit their business and would not create more red tape. *"We have the health unit on the committee, but not inspection at this point. I know that a number of producers don't want to participate in BLBF or any of these kinds of maps for fear of reprisal or* *the inspection. Farmers are independent entrepreneurs and they don't like a lot of government interference."*

Many of the HPFTTN organizers understood that they needed to build up a rapport with the producers and prove that there were benefits to getting involved. They felt that although there was more they could do to reach out to producers, producers had historically shown little interest in local markets. As one noted, *"Farmers could do more to plan around local markets such as the Good Food Box. In the past, there was an effort to get local food into the hospitals. The local producers wouldn't buy into it. They had no interest in growing for that market."* Sentiments such as these could be indicative of a lack of conviction among producers concerning whether these local markets would be successful or create a genuine beneficial gain for their enterprise. As one organizer pointed out, *"There is some resistance to the change, resistance to trying new things."*

In contrast, FLW and its programs have been well entrenched in the community for a number of years. For this reason most of the organizers felt that FLW was perceived as an advocate for local food issues and that it had successfully created awareness around food and agriculture, as well as provided a useful tool (i.e., the map) for all members of the community. One organizer suggested, "*Those that have been part of Foodlink activities will see Foodlink as a quasi-marketing arm and a champion for their issues, someone to represent their issues, a vehicle to advertise, and resource to develop business and explore value added opportunities."*

There was a sense that the organization created opportunities for social connections as well as networking opportunities for not just producers but also for those further downstream in the supply chain. *"The producers are only one of our clients now. Other clients include hospitality, restaurants, caterers, gourmet prep kitchens, urban based retailers, wholesalers and* *distributors, and institutional clients. We are making the connection across the breadth of the food chain now. We are overly represented by rural interests. It is a catch-22, but that is our roots."* To increase the benefits to producers, the organization has started introducing other services such as marketing advice, signage, and events geared toward connecting producers with restaurants and retailers who make potential buyers. These events have proven to be highly successful ways of creating new business opportunities and fundraising for the organization. It provides an opportunity to garner media attention, educate consumers and create a stronger community presence.

When discussion shifted to the map project specifically, individuals from both organizations were united in their belief that the maps be as inclusive as possible. Everyone suggested that a range of products was desirable and several suggested that more value-added products be included. The consensus seemed to be that anyone who was interested in selling a local product was encouraged to use the map as a marketing tool. As one organizer put it, *"A range of scales would be good, from the corn stand at the end of the road to someone who is really producing quality and quantity.* Another organizer expanded on that view, *"All farmers, including all scales of farming should be involved. There are a lot of small scale farms and not a lot of cash cropping (in the Waterloo Region), but we would be interested in that too, if they were interested in developing a local market."* The organizers felt strongly that all local producers should be involved because what the organization was offering had high payback with not a lot of investment. In their view, producers got cost-effective marketing and networking opportunities, which resulted in more sales and customers. *"As a producer, it is almost like having your own marketing firm for whatever nominal amount we charge. Not only are we* *promoting your product but also the whole notion of eating local. That is something a producer could never afford to do on their own."*

In exchange for the services provided, organizers did have some expectations of those who were involved with their projects, especially those involved with the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map. Most were adamant that producers 'buy in' to the organization and the map project by using the promotional material provided, collaborating with other producers to create new partnerships, and promoting the other producers on the map. *"I expect the producers to fully embrace Foodlink as their organization of choice when it comes to promoting their business interests. We expect them to take advantage of our full array of products and services and we hope they will take a full advantage of the Buy Local brand. We expect them to buy in or invest in the brand. We are not handing it out for free and they don't expect that."* Organizers wanted to encourage producers to work together, promote one another, and create a 'network' of local food advocates. *"I would like to see the producers promote the whole idea of farm to table and other producers on the map. It may be a big unrealistic hope, but I hope they would be ambassadors for the whole area-promoting producers, hotels, restaurants, etc."*

While the two organizations were not interested in regulating producers, there was an expectation that producers meet food safety regulations and produce a quality product. Further, organizers expected producers to be honest about their products and maintain the image of high quality local Ontario food products. It was also suggested that producers make sure to use visible signage to promote themselves and the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* brand and make sure the properties were safe attractive places to visit. *"I would love to see that they are open at reasonable times that people can actually stop and buy what they are selling. The farms are in decent shape, the visual goes hand in hand with whether or not people are going to stop."*

Both organizations have high aspirations for their producer members and for the growth of the local food sector. Both HPFTTN and FLW view themselves as a resource to the community and especially to the local producers. The following section portrays the producers' understanding of the situation

3.5.2 Producer Perspectives on Local Food Organizations

The producers were asked whether or not there was a role for intermediaries in the food system and who should play the role. These questions were followed by more specific questions on how they viewed the local food organization in their region (FLW or HPFTTN). For the most part, the results and reflections are pooled into one producer perspective, except when a clear distinction arose between producers in one region versus the other. Just over half (53%) of the 32 producers believed there was a role for an intermediary (or third-party) in the local food system. More specifically, these producers thought that an organization to advocate for producers, either through consumer education or through lobbying government to change policy, was important and necessary for the local food system to thrive. For example, one producer suggested that, *"We need someone to help us make connections, find a butcher, etc."* The rest of the producers (47%) did not necessarily feel that an organization was necessary to support their work, but instead felt that provincial and federal policy changes were necessary (although most also believed that it would never happen). Some of the producers suggested that they need to take on more responsibility as business owners. *"We want to take the product to the farm-gate and be done with it. As far as marketing is concerned we don't know or do enough. In my opinion, farmers need to pick up their bootstraps and do it for themselves. There is a place for a third party [local food organization], but you still need to promote what you are growing."*

Producer viewpoints differed between HPFTTN and FLW. The producers listed on the map with HPFTTN generally did not know much about the organization or its organizing members and so were unable to voice an opinion about the organization's goals. The organization had very little visibility in the community. Most producers received a mailing with a description of the map and an application form so there was little on which they could base their perceptions.   Many speculated that it must be to increase healthy food for customers, possibly because they were aware of the heavy involvement of the county health unit, or to increase tourism and economic development. Others suggested that it had more to do with creating awareness around local food issues. None of the producers viewed the organization as having an explicit desire to support local producers. In contrast, the producers involved with FLW felt that creating awareness and connections for producers and consumers were the main goals of the organization. They were also more likely to suggest that the organization was trying to support producers directly. When asked whether or not the organizations should play a role in connecting producers and consumers, most of the producers involved with FLW felt that the organization was already playing a role and that it was good thing. Those involved with HPFTTN were more reluctant to respond with a definitive answer, probably because they were largely unaware of the group's efforts.

Regardless of what the producers thought of the underlying mandate of the organization in their area, there was a general sense that the organizations (and the map in particular) provided them with cheap publicity and advertising. Other perceived benefits included increased networking opportunities and potential business connections. Overall, the producers were divided on whether the maps were encouraging more customers to visit the farm or seek out their products with 56% indicated that they saw some increase in sales or customer interest and 44%

indicating that they saw no changes. Interestingly, very few producers kept track of how customers were hearing about them and many were unsure of the impact the map had on their business. Some producers felt the map was absolutely essential in growing their business. For example, one producer explained, *"I would like to focus more on growing and have someone else market my products."* Another producer said he looked forward to the following benefits, *"[It] will draw a wider range of customers, especially tourism and possibly more wholesale."* Many producers in the FLW region suggested that they were able to grow with the map, *"Back when we started selling out of garage we went on BLBF map and then it was new and we didn't get a lot of traffic but now five years later everyone wants the map. It is the tool and if they don't have it when they get here we give it to them. I would say that the map was a big part of it. From that map we joined the committee for the taste local event. We met other farmers and chefs."*

For the most part, producers appear to be using the map as part of their larger marketing strategy, *"Word of mouth is the best way to grow customer base. When we started we got referrals from friends and family both in London and locally. The map brought out some [consumers] and the Blyth farmers market was a good starting place. We just started to advertise in the paper."* Events such as the annual Taste Local event that pairs restaurants and farmers at a harvest fundraiser dinner have often resulted in long-term partnerships. As one producer noted, *"The taste local restaurant paired with us started buying eggs from us already."* Only four producers said that they did not see any benefits to participation, perhaps because their enterprise was not necessarily well suited to local direct sales or because they were not in a high traffic area. In one case, the producer said she didn't need the publicity, but liked to support the organization.

3.6 Conclusion

As more local food organizations emerge to foster growth and innovation in the food and agriculture sector, the securing of producer involvement would seem to be an imperative. Understanding the motivations and perceptions of both producers and local food organizations can facilitate that involvement (Smithers et al., 2005). This requires organizations to focus on developing good relationships with their producer members. The two organizations portrayed in this paper have made significant efforts to offer a valuable service to producers and in return attempted to get producers to 'buy-in' to their concept and embrace the organization as a resource. Beyond that, the organizations were hoping to make a community-level impact by creating economic and environmental conditions that mutually benefit producers and community members. Without producer support and a willingness to continue paying for their spot on the map (and other services) the organizations will be unable to meet their goals.

It was clear that in the case of FLW, producers were well aware of this dynamic of mutual benefit and valued the work of the organization enough to continue their participation and to spread the word to other producers. In the case of HPFTTN, it appears that the organization still needs to prove itself to the producer community in order to garner a more established support base. Across both organizations, while many producers were hesitant to be involved at first, they found the organizations' projects to be beneficial, if not lucrative, over time. Once the producers in the Waterloo region were able to see the benefits gained, either through their own experience or that of producers who had joined earlier, producer interest continued to grow. In Huron and Perth counties, producers were much more hesitant and had not yet seen clear benefits from the initiative, partially because there had not been enough time to generate substantial interest. Like other agricultural innovations, the marketing of local food grew as the early adopters succeeded and became highly visible to others in the region (Ilbery, 1985; Rogers, 1995; Smithers and Furman, 2003).

Similar to what others have found, many producers indicated that they did not have the skills or resources necessary for making good use of the local food sector (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Starr et al., 2003; Ross, 2006; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007). Producers may not feel the need to buy-in to the broader goals of the organization, but they appear very willing to utilize the services and acquire ‘cheap’ advertising whether or not they even know who is providing it. One way to encourage more participation would be to ensure producers were aware of the organization, its central mandate, and to the success of previous producer members. The additional communication, especially coming from a ‘change agent’ who understood the needs and circumstances of local producers would likely be well-received (Brown, 1981; Guerin and Guerin, 1994). In addition, most producers appeared more eager to secure changes in government policy than local food promotion. Perhaps one way organizations can gain more producer support is by lobbying for those changes and assisting producers in building their capacity to individually and collectively influence policy.

Returning to the design of the case study, while a direct comparison of the two organizations seemed to be intuitively useful, the differences in the farm base and food economy in each region was a constant challenge. Waterloo region had a well established direct marketing sector before the advent of Foodlink; nevertheless, FLW has facilitated further development of the local food economy to the extent that many people are now building their business model around Foodlink- supported initiatives. The counties of Huron and Perth had a history of large-scale production and a much smaller population to serve as consumers for direct marketing, which hindered the growth of HPFTTN.

Further research on this topic would be valuable in assisting organizations working with producers. Some factors were difficult to assess given that the sample consisted entirely of producers who had already paid to participate on the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map. Interviews with two additional producers groups could add insight not gleaned from the producers covered in this paper. The first would be producers who had paid to participate on the map in the past, but withdrew in subsequent years. The second would be producers who fit the profile for participation, but choose not to participate at all. Such an investigation would provide additional insight on barriers to both the adoption of local food as a business focus and participation in Buy Local initiatives.

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CHAPTER FOUR

MIXING MARKETS: EXPLORING ENTERPRISE COMPLEXITY IN THE LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

4.1 Abstract

From a rural development perspective, local food systems provide opportunities for farm enterprises to capture and contribute added value in the region. However, these potential benefits are frustrated in some cases, by the fact that the current agri-food system is structured in a way that largely discourages producers from selling products locally and impedes consumers from accessing products from their own region. The literature on local food often takes for granted the notion that producers selling food on a local scale are operating solely within the 'alternative' local food system. This paper challenges the notion of a closed local food system and expands on literature that describes diversification strategies including simultaneous participation in both the global agri-food system and a local food system.

Using rich empirical evidence from producers in both rural and near –urban areas in Southern Ontario, this paper portrays a wide array of business enterprises and diverse strategies for marketing and selling food products on a local scale. The data, drawn from interviews with 32 producers, examines the motivations for developing local markets and further explores the challenges that producers face when developing those market outlets. The study illustrates the idea that selling food locally is one diversification strategy that does not necessarily eliminate participation in the global agri-food system.

Findings indicate that a combination of lifestyle and economic factors influence the decision to develop local market outlets. As producers transition through various business trajectories their practices were classified into two categories: local only and mixed markets.

Findings also indicate common barriers to growing a local food economy. These include competition from cheap imports, lack of processing and transportation infrastructure, and distance from an urban population.

4.2 Introduction

In recent years it has become standard practice to portray local food as food with a story attached to it. This "local food story" is, in reality, an amalgamation of many elements: localities, people (producers, consumers, and facilitators), practices, venues, and values. Arising from this composite story is a set of broad understandings and expectations about who is producing the local food and how it is distributed. Some aspects of the local food story have received more attention in the literature than others. For instance, perspectives on consumer preferences, farmer's market vendors, and the prominent nodes along various short-chain food systems (Renting et al., 2003) are included in the versions commonly told. Local food actors outside of the supply-chain have also been included, although not to the same extent.

As the many dimensions of the local food story continue to evolve, there is both an opportunity and a need to "drill down" into the constituent parts in ways that reveal the conceptual and empirical richness and complexity of these "local food stories." The study reported in this paper is a final installment in a series of analyses that explored a variety of issues and questions concerning local food production and promotion in Southern Ontario. The first two papers document the activities of community organizations working in the middle of the farm to plate dynamic. This paper, the third in the series, concerns itself with the people and practices implicated at the beginning of the "local food story", food producers.

It is contended that consumer preference for authentic artisanal products has driven the development of a local food economy that emphasizes quality related to place and production practices, thus opening up new opportunities for producers who wish to sell outside "mainstream" markets (Kirwan, 2004). The trend toward local foods is seen by some as a strategy for helping farmers and regions to capture "value" by redirecting food produced into a shorter, more local or regionalized system (Renting et al., 2003). This value can be economic, in the form of better returns on labour and capital, or social in the form of reattaching a human face to food production (Feenstra, 2002; Hinrichs, 2003; Morris and Buller, 2003; Lyson 2004). Local food is generally characterized as fresh, artisanal, safe and less processed (and in many cases, higher quality) than its imported and/or industrial counterparts.

It is not surprising then, that innovative marketing strategies that integrate and promote the "quality" characteristics of local food are becoming increasingly important to producers of local products (Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck, 2001). Studies on local food involving producers have generally focused on philosophical motives, adjustment strategies, relationships with consumers, or a specific marketing strategy such as the farmers' market (Hinrichs, 2000; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Smithers et al., 2008). The latter provide a good starting point, but it is probable that local food producers are much more diverse than just those selling in direct markets and are not necessarily all farmers.

It can sometimes be assumed, on the basis of this scholarship, that locally oriented producers are seen distinctly as "other" in comparison to those producers targeting the extended global marketplace. Indeed, it is often assumed that producers are guided by a commitment to "connection" (Feenstra, 1997), and a philosophical preference for alterity or distinctiveness (Kneen 1993). By extension, the industrial side of the production sector seems destined to be seen in other ways. Here, the more frequent descriptors are competitive, specialized, and technology dependent (Beus and Dunlap, 1990). Often, there is an implicit assumption, at least in the attempt to generalize, that local food producers and markets are somehow distinct and separate from the industrial food system. However, more recent inquiries of local food producer values, motivations, and practices suggest that many are in fact "mixing" these purportedly opposing strategies (Hinrichs, 2003; Starr et al., 2003; Trabalzi, 2007), although it is not clear to what extent or why that is occurring. The "mixing" of enterprise strategies and resulting food systems can provide insight into the realities of selling food in the current economy.

This paper adopts, and seeks to operationalize, a different, non binary view, one that begins with the premise that producers are diversifying and participating in "hybrid" food systems (Ilbery and Maye, 2006), that include a mix of strategies on-farm as well as off-farm and may include producers who are not farmers. In so doing, this paper interrogates the values and motivation in "market-mixing" and examines the prospects for persistence and possible growth in producer participation in the local food economy. The recent focus on direct marketing strategies and the various nodes in short- chain food supply provides a good starting point for exploring the role of producers in local food economies. In particular, this paper draws on recently completed producer interviews to: a) present the empirical richness of producer strategies for participation in a local food economy; and b) identify the extent and rationale of market-mixing/food system mixing in relation to local and extended food systems.

The paper starts with an exploration of the reported motives, strategies, and barriers of producers in the local food economy as well as the evidence of "market-mixing" through a review of the current literature. The paper then moves on to present the details of a recent investigation of local food producer practices in two study sites in Southwestern Ontario. The first part of the study outlines the approach adopted and provides details on data collection, analytical techniques, and background features of the study site. This is followed by a section that details the findings, starting with characterizations of the producers and their wide ranging enterprise models; moving on to the strategies and motivations these producers utilize when developing their supply chains or diversification strategies and the common barriers that producers face when developing local markets. The paper concludes with some reflection on the levels of “market-mixing” and related complexity present among producers’ enterprise models in local food economies. It will make the case that enterprise and market complexity in the local food economy results in a hybrid system with many diversification strategies.

4.3 Framing Local Food from the Producer Side

Local food producers have been characterized first and foremost as farmers operating small -scale enterprises that are focused primarily on direct contact with end consumers (Starr et al., 2003; Selfa and Qazi, 2005; Hultine et al., 2007). Many producers choose this enterprise model, but a brief perusal of local food directories in most locations reveals a much broader range of local food producers than small-scale farmers with direct sales. In order to expand our understanding of the local food supply side, the characterization of local food producers must be broadened. Historically, it has been understood that farmer/producer participation in the local food economy represents both an enterprise decision and a personal household choice (Moran, 1993; Smithers and Johnson, 2004). This invokes insights and theorization in rural geography and sociology concerning farm-level decision-making and pathways of enterprise development (Smithers and Johnson, 2004).

Traditional pathways of development included intensification of production to meet economies of scale, or one of the multiple forms of diversification, such as multiple commodities, market venues, or non-farming income. More recently, diversification has come to include the development of local markets and more value-added products. Although not all food producers are farmers, local food enterprises tend to mirror the dynamics and features of a family farm as identified in the literature. Some of the common attributes include the conflation of household and enterprise goals, reliance on the labour of family and friends, and periodically, the need to "self exploit" (Moran, 1993).   Therefore, this paper will draw on insights from literature that describes the motivations and strategies of farmers actively engaged in the local food economy.

Producers engaging in direct markets understand that consumer beliefs about quality and freshness are essential to the sale of their products (Kirwan, 2004). While the consumers' attraction to local food is more about quality of a product, producers in a study by Selfa and Qazi (2005) indicated that they were attracted to the reduced travel time involved in delivering their products. Direct marketing and other models of short-chain food supply offer producers an alternative market outlet for products that have the potential to bring a price premium, because of their association with "authenticity and quality". For producers, the benefits of local markets can range from more diverse production strategies and business opportunities, as well as growth in social capital and community support (Feenstra, 2002; Hinrichs, 2003; Morris and Buller, 2003; Lyson 2004).

Motivations for selling in a local food economy are varied and usually driven by some combination of lifestyle factors, response to demand, and unplanned growth in a particular area of sales (Ilbery and Maye, 2006). For example, Griffin and Frongillo (2003) found that producers often chose farmers' markets because of both economic and social factors. Many of the producers in their study reported practicality and access to the market as a primary motivation to sell at a farmers' market rather than through a conventional grocery store. This is evident in empirical work that suggests that many producers participate in direct marketing schemes both because of the experience of the transaction and because they receive a premium price (Hinrichs, 2000; Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Kirwan, 2004; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007). In particular, Ostrom and Jussaume (2007) found opportunity to be a primary factor driving the development of local sales. The opportunities afforded to producers who adopt direct marketing strategies, in some local food economies, are purported to be sufficient to encourage producers to shift the focus of their enterprise to the local market. Other motivations were suggested by Hutline et al. (2007), who discovered that farmer participation in a local food project was often motivated by the desire to slowly develop a career in farming.

Producers in the local food economy frequently utilize what are considered innovative forms of marketing such as farm stores, CSA (community supported agriculture) or subscription programs, farmers' markets, produce auctions, specialty shops, and farm websites (Renting et al., 2003). Those who were not selling directly to consumers were selling in the local food economy through brokers or wholesalers, or to local restaurants and/or retailers. Multiple studies found that the buyer- supplier relationship was dependent on personal communication and was often developed through "word-of-mouth" connections (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 2000; Starr et al., 2003). Location influenced the type of local market developed, (Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007) as producers chose market outlets that were accessible and/or suitable to their particular enterprise.

Some commonly cited barriers to developing a local food economy include competition from cheap imports (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Ostrom, 2006; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007), lack of infrastructure, particularly processing and transportation (Ostrom, 2006; Ross, 2006), and distance from an urban population. These are examples of external challenges, pressure from outside the enterprise itself. Several specific internal challenges producers often face include finding affordable labour and balancing time between production of a product and marketing the product (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003). Producers are also likely to speak about the need for consumer education on local products and farming issues generally (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003).

In a study by Ostrom (2006), producers indicated that the population in their region, an area that supplies large quantities of vegetables and fruit for export, was not sufficient to support a major shift to local market outlets. Although there was only limited opportunity for local sales because of the population size, many producers indicated that they would like to increase their direct marketing and local sales as it decreases transaction costs and brings a higher return. Hinrichs (2003) found that rural communities, despite having strong agricultural advantages, offered limited opportunities for direct marketing and local food systems. Ross (2006) found that local food producers in Maine were successful when they remained flexible and adaptable with markets and product ranges in order to meet demand and available markets.

Although transaction costs are thought to decrease, Verhaegen et al. (2001) found that innovative marketing channels were associated with producers taking over aspects of production such as packaging, transport, selling and occasionally processing. These additional aspects of production and marketing create value and often bring better financial returns, but can also bring some additional “transaction costs” in the form of additional time requirements, information transfer and quality control (Hobbs and Young, 1999). In some cases, transaction costs could be significant enough to deter producers from making a shift to the local food economy, especially in value-added enterprises.

4.4 Diversification and Hybridity in the Food System

It has been suggested that farming households are adaptable and responsive to market demands, for some, by diversifying income with the addition of off-farm labour and for others, by diversifying the farming business (Lobley and Potter, 2004). In a study of local food producers, Starr et al. (2003) found that those who were using direct markets tended to be more diversified than those who did not. This study and others have led to the assumption that many diversification strategies pulled producers out of the industrial food system and created an "alternative food system" (Evans and Ilbery, 1993; Evans et al., 2002), with local food fitting into such an alternative system (Feenstra, 1997; Hinrichs, 2000; Kirwan, 2004). This may be the case, but it is not yet clear if producers who engage with local market outlets are largely disengaged from the industrial food system or even if that is the intended goal of diversification.

Essex, et al. (2005) contend that at a local level, alternative food networks are directly connected to broader more industrial systems of production. Ilbery and Maye (2006) approached the food system from a supply chain perspective and introduced the idea of a 'hybrid food space' where producers and consumers are seen to be participating in both local and global food systems. It is easy to see how this is the case with consumers – purchasing some food from a local farmers market and the rest from the supermarket, but it is not so clear with producers. Ostrom and Jussaume (2007) employ this perspective by suggesting that producers who engage with local marketing strategies are often mixing local and industrial markets. Hinrichs (2003) found evidence of this ‘market-mixing’ in Iowa where commodity production sometimes subsidized direct marketing venues such as CSAs. Trabalzi (2007: 283) suggests “...local producers do not necessarily follow specific production logistics, whether of scale or variety.” Instead he found that they interchange practices and knowledge from the full range of available sources.

Thus far, the literature on local food has attached a high level of importance to the characteristics of local food producers that link them with alternative food movements (Feenstra, 1997; Hinrichs, 2000; Morris and Buller, 2003; Kirwan, 2004; Lyson, 2004) and little attention on the diversity of producers within the local food economy. As noted earlier, this paper attempts to draw together work on local food economies with traditional approaches to explore producer/farmer enterprise trajectories, motivations, and challenges. Further, an examination of diversification strategies, ‘market-mixing’, and the resulting complexity warrant additional attention.

4.5 Exploring Local Food Producer Practices in Southern Ontario

Research was conducted in three counties in Southern Ontario for the purpose of documenting producer motivations, strategies, and challenges and checking for the presence and nature of enterprise hybridity. While a variety of research methods are possible, this research adopted a locality based case study approach that featured direct on-site engagement with producers. The study sites were chosen for their recent local food activity and the presence of a specific project initiative – a map of local producers, which was used to locate and identify producers currently engaged in the local food economy.

The western part of the study area, Huron and Perth counties, is comprised of primarily rural communities and a settlement pattern that is predominately farm-based. The agricultural system remains dominated by large-scale livestock production and cash cropping, although there has been a growing interest in creating a local food economy. There is also a large tourism industry due to the presence of the Lake Huron shoreline and the well-established and highly popular collection of theatres in Stratford, the county seat of Perth County. In contrast, Waterloo region is much more urbanized, with three large cities (Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge) surrounded by rural space that is characterized by smaller farm sizes and a long history of direct marketing to consumers. Although the region is dominated by urban spaces, its rural character is intact and draws people interested in access to farms and local food. The region is well-known as a place to visit Mennonite communities and purchase hand-made crafts and foodstuffs of local Mennonite farmers as well as other local producers.

Many local food producers in both regions advertise on *Buy Local Buy Fresh* maps, one of the common ways of introducing consumers to sources of local food. These maps are essentially directories of farms, retailers, and restaurants that are selling local food. The two maps used to locate farmers for this study were produced by the Huron-Perth Field to Table Network (HPFTTN) and Foodlink Waterloo (FLW), organizations committed to promoting local food economies. The data for this paper are drawn from recent engagement with producers who were selected from these *Buy Local Buy Fresh* maps, which means all study participants have self identified as local food producers by paying to have their enterprise listed on the map. Beyond this, the diversity of participants is broad and covers both large and small-scale production and a variety of products. Growing conditions in the study area allows for a wide variety of foodstuffs to be produced, ranging from fruits, vegetables, honey, and maple syrup to cheese, eggs, and meat (sold frozen). It was originally anticipated that the selected producers would all be farmers, but it was discovered that the listings for local producers also included those who were not farmers. Thus, the focus shifted to local food producers which include farmers, artisanal food producers, small-scale processors, and abattoirs. It should be noted that it is likely that not all producers who sell in a local market are participating in the map project and therefore some producers in the region were excluded from this study.

The study included 32 interviews conducted at the site of production, and generated insight into the motivations, strategies, and barriers of local food producers. In order to appreciate the recent and planned evolution in enterprise trajectories, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted on the farm or at the site of the retail outlet. The interviews were recorded (except in 8 cases where participants declined permission) and later transcribed. The interviews were supplemented by direct observation of either the site of production or the retail establishment, depending on the type of enterprise. Interviews were coded and analyzed using descriptive and interpretive analysis techniques (Tesch, 1990). A list of relevant thematic codes was developed by reviewing each interview transcript to identify important themes (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data segments that indicated common attributes were used to refine thematic codes and develop new codes, such that each salient segment of data was assigned a code and compared across transcripts to identify similarities and differences (Tesch, 1990; Patton, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The frequency of responses in each coded category was identified.

4.6 Characterizing Enterprises and Commodities in the Local Food Economy

This section gives a broad overview of the characteristics for all the producers while a more in-depth description of the different types of producers involved will follow. For the most part, the respondents had been in business for over a decade, although the degree to which producers were focused on their enterprise as a livelihood varied. They also differed markedly in the paths taken to local food production and sales. Over half of the producers have been engaged in the local food economy for over 10 years and the rest have more recently started to explore local marketing channels either as part of a new enterprise or as a diversification strategy. Just over half of the producers (56%) derive their full household income from their enterprise and another 44% were making at least half of their household income from the enterprise. Some respondents with newer enterprises were not yet making any money on the business.

The literature, and reported experiences in many agricultural regions suggests that producers' motivations for participation in the local food economy range from deeply held beliefs about community and sustainability to more instrumental concerns such as economic viability. Respondents were asked to comment on their beliefs about the importance of local food in their region and community. Producers responded from a range of perspectives, with just under half mentioning nutritional benefits, food safety, good quality, and environmental benefits of local food. A majority (69%) of them indicated that both community and economic aspects of local food are important. Most responded that knowing where food comes from and supporting those who produce food is vital for everyone involved. About half (47%) of the producers indicated that they purchased local products or supported other local producers. It is possible that this number would be higher if more producers had access to other sources of local products, especially those located in rural regions.

Many (84%) producers reported that they supported their community and neighbours by participating in the local economy, and further indicated that their connection to the community was strengthened by selling their products in the local economy and developing relationships with their consumers. Despite their desire to support their community, the strongest motivator for selling locally seems to stem from a pragmatic view about the best way to sell a product in order to get the best return for the labour or input costs. Table I shows that the majority (94%) of producers choose to sell locally for pragmatic reasons (lifestyle, viability etc) rather than purely philosophical reasons, although it should be noted that these often overlap. Many producers do not have enough volume or a reliable market for selling their products into the mainstream food system. Others rely on local markets because it fits their household or personal preference. These factors will be discussed in further detail throughout the rest of the paper.

Table 4.1 Primary Motivations for Selling in a Local Food Economy

Primary Motivation	**# Enterprises (n= 32)**
Industrial Outlets Not Viable For Product	11
Lifestyle (convenience/career shift/household)	10
Desire to Maintain Scale of Operation/Control of Product	6
Market Crash (e.g. BSE in 2003) and instability in dominant markets	4
Philosophy (ie: community, opposition to mainstream, environment)	2

A variety of factors went into choosing a local market outlet and many of those decisions were dependent on product range, location, and lifestyle. The two most common marketing outlets are farm-gate sales and direct marketing to restaurants and retailers. Both of these marketing channels were developed primarily through “word of mouth” connections. The respondents’ market outlets ranged from small on-farm retail outlets to large enterprises with a primary market in the industrial sector and a local market on the side. Of the 32 producers interviewed, 22 producers (69%) indicated that location or proximity to an urban population played a role in the type of enterprise they have chosen to develop.

Producers who were on a well-traveled road or in a more populated region, were more likely to develop farm stands or on-site retail stores, whereas producers who were not on a major road or near an urban centre tended to cultivate markets outlets away from the site of production, such as direct relationships with restaurants or retailers. All producers had at least some sale on the premises, but there were only four producers who relied on those sales as a major outlet that did not have an ideal location on well-traveled road or near an urban centre.

As noted above, a wide range of marketing strategies were utilized by respondents. In addition to marketing items they produce, many also market items they *add* to their product range. For example, many of the producers sell multiple types of food products and may supplement their range by purchasing products from other local producers. This is especially true for those who sell at the farmers' market or those have built retail outlets onsite and try to make the consumers' visit to the farm an appealing experience. For instance, a family raising cattle started selling freezer beef out of their garage and slowly expanded to a large stand-alone retail space. *"We have regular customers that come from Newmarket, Toronto, everywhere and if they are going to drive all the way out it is pretty cool if they can be buying all of the local products and we can support that many more local farm families."*

Participants exhibited a variety of approaches in market building and product placement but a common feature for many was reliance on personal relationships. Over half (56%) of the producers interviewed have cultivated direct relationships with retailers, restaurants, and other market outlets and maintain that these relationships are key to their success. Respondents pointed out that these relationships are generally started either when the producer contacted the market outlet in order to pitch a product, or when the buyer responded to an advertisement or "word of mouth" information. As a whole, there was evidence of an ongoing effort to actively cultivate and perpetuate these important links with local market outlets. Other methods of drawing in new customers include advertising in newspapers, radio, magazines, and other media or promotional sources (n=9), working with a distributor (n=5), creating a website (n=4), putting up signage (n=6) and, of course, listing the enterprise on the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* Map. Overall, producers suggested that the best advertising was "word of mouth" and indicated that it was the most reliable way to get new customers.

Producers also suggested that the success of their market development efforts ultimately rested on the quality of their product. When asked to go further and expand on quality, the producers invoked three main themes: freshness, care in preparation, and (good) taste. Nearly all of the producers (97%) described their products as high quality and described quality as fresh, well made, and good tasting. Many producers convey the characteristics or quality of their product by what it is not---a product grown in another part of the world without the regulations required in Canada. Furthermore, there was a strong emphasis on the "hands on" attention to details. As one local corn producer put it, *"the quality of our product is better than others from what we hear. We do everything by hand. Quality is attention to detail."* Attention to detail was also described as maintaining control of the product from the beginning until delivered to the consumer. Furthermore, at least six producers indicated that providing quality products and maintaining control was their primary rationale for selling on a smaller scale.

One cheese producer states, *"I have 100% control of the product from start to finish. I control the goats, diet, milk, ensures the best quality. Because we have small volume, I have hands on every cheese that leaves here. The minute you grow and surrender control to other businesses the quality changes because the person working puts their imprint on the product."* Respondents also suggested that consumer education on issues such as seasonality of products and premium pricing was important to increasing sales.

The nature and extent of producer engagement with local markets is complex and defies easy categorization. An obvious and immediate discovery is that simple binaries are not useful in placing producers in either the local food or mainstream commodity systems. Indeed, some 47% of respondents operate in the local food economy while also utilizing industrial or "mainstream" market outlets. The remaining 53% sell only in the local food economy, but have other aspects of complexity such as multiple local marketing channels, specialized operations such as processing facilities, or source products from other local supplies or distributors. An additional level of complexity is attributed to the fact that many of the enterprises are dynamic, and may be shifting towards a new enterprise model. Hence, they should be understood in light of both current practice and intended trajectories.

Many of the enterprises are complex entities that make use of multiple local outlets and may engage in both local markets and more industrial scale markets. A local apple producer explains, *"We have an on-farm store (with items brought in from other producers), a large storage facility, and a farmers' market stand. We do wholesale to large grocery stores and food service companies; we deliver to the food terminal in the Ontario Grown section, and ship overseas on occasion."* The following section explores the complexity encountered in many respondents' enterprises in further detail.

4.6.1 Complexity in the Local Food Economy

The "market-mixing" present in many of the producers' enterprises hints at the high level of complexity and highlights the prevalence of "hybridity" in the local food economy. Much of this complexity is a result of either a move to diversify an enterprise or an effort to slowly transition the enterprise into a new area of production, producers transition through various business trajectories, while exhibiting a variety of forms, the range of practices can be captured using a simple two part classification. The producers were classified into two distinct categories with the understanding that individual enterprises are indeed diverse and defy easy classification. Nevertheless, the classification that was developed was based on the presence or lack of "market-mixing" in the enterprise. The first category indicates a participation only in the local food economy and the second category indicates the presence of market-mixing. As noted earlier, for the purposes of this paper "market-mixing" is defined as a producer whose enterprise has some engagement with the local economy and some engagement with the industrial food economy.

Producers who are operating entirely in the local food economy make up 53% of study participants. Overall, *local only* producers use a diverse set of market outlets, display a range of enterprise structures, and sell every type of product available in the local food economy. Overall, *mixed-market* producers make up 47% of study participants, and of those 86% have livestock as part of their enterprise, compared to only 35% of the producers who are marketing only in the local food economy.

4.6.2 Local Only

Of the 17 *local only* producers, all but two were providing at least 50% of the household income from their local food enterprise and eight were providing 100% of their household income. Some of these producers were full-time and others had jobs off-farm. One farmer stated, *"I believe that you shouldn't have to work off the farm for the farm to work so we said let's try doing this – something to create more income that is on the farm."* Producers who were providing a significant portion of the household income from their enterprise had dedicated retail space on their farm or site of primary production and for the most part had diverse product ranges, either from their own farm or products brought in from other local producers.

For the most part, full-time producers choose this type of enterprise because they want to work on the farm and have found success with on-farm sales. Those working an off-farm job, have taken on farming as a second career and developed local markets because it created a feasible way to make a portion of their living from the farm. This type of enterprise allows producers to invest as much or as little time, labour, and money into the enterprise as their lifestyle, family and financial arrangements allow.

Not all producers are able to make local sales work on a larger scale, but use the flexibility and low level of investment as a way to make it work within the family dynamics. One woman describes how her family's life-stage impacted her decision. *"Fourteen years ago I quit my job, had a baby, and bought this farm. My husband works off- farm and I wanted something that I could do on my own."* Other producers have used local markets as a way to ease into farming and gain knowledge about the marketplace. *"We sell on farm because it is easy. We are already there and when we started we weren't familiar with any other markets. Pumpkins were heavy to transport so it was easier to sell them on-farm. Then we started going* *to the market to get rid of extra raspberries."* Many producers started selling locally in a small way, found it successful and decided to expand their local marketing channels.

The two producers who were deriving less than half of their income from the business had relatively new enterprises (2 years and 4 years) and had yet to develop strong products and markets. Full-time employment off the farm made market development difficult and slowed the process of enterprise expansion. Both producers (one an apple producer and the other a mix of vegetables and livestock) are interested in transitioning to at least part-time farming, but had not been able to make it work at the time of the interview. In both cases, the farms were located far off a well-traveled road and were a considerable distance from an urban population, which makes the marketing aspect of the enterprise particularly challenging.

Local only producers sell primarily fruits, vegetables, and freezer meat, with only two producers engaged with post-production aspects of the operation. There were three producers who had primarily vegetable production enterprises, including one who sells through a CSA and farmer's markets and two who sell primarily at the retail space on the farm. There were six producers selling livestock, three of which sold a mix of livestock and vegetables in an on-site farm store and three who sold livestock to restaurants, retailers, and informally at the farm-gate. Three of the producers had apple orchards, including one u-pick operation, one farm store, and one packinghouse and distribution business. Additionally, there were three producers who had a mixed vegetable and fruit enterprises with farm sales, two of whom did u-pick along with the farm store. Most of the producers from all types of enterprises sold occasionally to restaurants or at farmers' markets when there was sufficient supply. Only 6 of the 17 producers had no experience selling beyond the farm-gate. At least four of the producers buy products from other local producers to supplement a community-supported agriculture box or farm store.

Two of the producers in the local only category are engaged primarily in post-production, including a local egg grading station and a sheep cheese producer supporting 17 shepherds. These producers are marketing through multiple channels such as restaurants, retailers, farmers' markets and a local produce auction. They have well-developed networks with neighbouring producers and various market outlets. They work full-time on the enterprise and spend significant amounts of their time managing the processing and distribution, rather than producing the raw product, although they still have some role in production as well. These two producers had very few on-site sales, as their enterprise was not well set up for visitors, but geared toward supplying other market outlets. In addition, they were more likely to discuss concerns around wholesale prices, maintaining contacts with distributors or large retailers, and struggles around delivery time. They also expressed interest in expanding sales and production, but felt there were significant barriers due to the cost of increasing their infrastructure and labour.

Local only producers are engaged in the local food economy through their network of markets and the relationships they have developed with restaurateurs, chefs, abattoirs, and other local producers or retailers. They work primarily with the "word of mouth" type of advertisement and rely on informal networking to gain more customers. At least eight producers are using multiple local marketing channels that range from u-pick enterprises with some products going to local restaurants or farmers' markets to a full range on-farm store supporting numerous local producers. Although, many are utilizing multiple market outlets, farm-gate sales remain an important aspect of their enterprise. Two of the producers were able to successfully transition from industrial livestock production to fully local enterprises by focusing on sales of packaged meat products through local restaurants and on farm retail sales.

4.6.3 Mixed-Market

There are 15 producers who fall in the mixed-market category; eleven of these producers provide 100% of their household income from agriculture and the other four provide less than half their income from agriculture. The latter have off-farm jobs to support themselves and their families. The producers in this category were less sure of how much income was from local sources and how much from more conventional market outlets, most often because their enterprises were intertwined enough that the distinction was not maintained. The mixed-market enterprises tend to include large-scale livestock operations and/or land for cash cropping. The only two mixed-market enterprises that did not have either livestock or cash crops had mid-sized processing facilities instead.

For half of the mixed-market producers, the industrial aspect of their enterprise is very distinct from their local market channels. They are full-time farmers with a large-scale industrial livestock operation and a side enterprise selling vegetables through a farm-stand or CSA. For example, *"I had a full beef and dairy operation but retired the dairy in 1979. I kept the cash crops and the beef and started growing onions for wholesale. The onions didn't work out. Then I learned to grow corn. In 1998, my son sold corn in a wagon at the end of the laneway. We transitioned to a gazebo and increased our sweet corn production. Now we have a stand on-farm and sell mixed vegetables. We still have some of the cash crops and a small cow/calf operation."* They would like to shift their enterprise more toward local marketing channels, but are not yet ready to take that leap completely, and see labour as a limiting factor. They all see direct marketing as easier to manage than developing networks with restaurants or retailers. Most of the producers have developed multiple local marketing channels in the same manner as the local only producers. These markets range from on-farm stores to a local produce auction and some connections with local restaurants.

The other half of producers in this category use both industrial and local marketing channels for the same product. Four of the producers have livestock operations where they sell a portion of their livestock through the industrial channels and a portion through multiple local marketing channels, such as farm-gate sales or local restaurants and retailers. These producers were discouraged by the prices they received through livestock contracts or at the local stockyard, which led them to started exploring ways to make the farm remain viable. *"The pigs were supposed to be the main thing, but now the bees make more than the pigs."* All four livestock producers indicated that they would prefer to be full-time farmers, but cannot grow their enterprise enough to be viable just yet. They struggle with cultivating and maintaining good networks with customers, finding abattoirs in reasonable proximity to the farm, and maintaining enough freezer space for their products. They are, for the most part, located too far from an urban centre to draw enough people to their farms, and primarily because of their off-farm work struggle with the time and labour involved with organizing delivery to local market outlets.

The producers in this category, who do not have livestock, have specialized operations that incorporate processing and distributing on a much larger scale such as a local abattoir, a garlic processor, a turkey farm and processing facility, and artisanal cheese makers. These producers have made their food production enterprise their full-time career and are more likely to have staff members who work on various aspects of the operation. They spend significant time managing and cultivating multiple marketing channels and are likely to be at arm's length from the production of the raw product. Three of the producers shipped products to international markets where they emphasized their Ontario made product in the global marketplace.

All of the producers with specialized operations sell some product through local retailers and have at least a small amount available at an on-site retail outlet. These producers are the most likely to end up selling to mainstream grocery stores because they produce enough volume and have the capacity to include a UPC barcode. They are most likely to be frustrated by purchasing policies and competition from cheap imports. These producers are also the most likely to be challenged by regulations around processing infrastructure. A producer with an on-farm goat dairy explains. *"Value-added cheese from milk seemed a logical step. It just meant a lot of hurdles to get established."* Their motivation to sell a portion of their product locally is usually based around the idea of giving back to their local community, maintaining a good avenue for feedback from customers, and personal preference because the bulk of their revenue is from more distant markets. As a local abattoir owner suggests, *"I think it is important for the economy and there is a little bit of idealism that goes with it."*

4.7 Challenges in Selling Locally

When asked about challenges to selling in the local food economy, producers implicated distant barriers, barriers existing in the immediate local, and issues located within the enterprise itself. The first two barriers are considered factors external to the enterprise, while the latter is considered to be an internal challenge or barrier. When articulating specific external challenges, the most prevalent response (38%) was concerns about competition from cheap imports. In addition, producers (12.5%) mentioned that attempts to sell directly to supermarkets were difficult because of restrictions placed on most stores by the parent corporation and the prevalence of centralized ordering and distributing in most supermarkets.

Producers were keenly aware and strongly critical of the fact that supermarkets routinely import products just before the time when Ontario products are in season and then undercut the prices of local producers. A strawberry producer described a sentiment that was shared by a number of producers, *"the grocery stores are a total lost cause. You have to give it to them. Initially when we started I had it in mind to sell at grocery stores. I would see all the produce getting imported into Ontario and I thought we can provide that locally. But then I saw the prices that they were charging on the store shelf. They are unwilling to deal with farmers. They buy from central warehousing over the computers. They don't care where the food comes from. They won't even look at us."*

Other external challenges included difficulties with regulations relating to township bylaws and provincial / federal regulations related to on-farm sales and processing facilities. Sixteen percent of the producers had trouble with zoning and/or signage laws that restrict their ability to create an on-farm retail outlet. As one producer put it, *"There is red tape in having a farm stand. It is illegal to sell someone else's products unless you sell them along with a certain percentage of your own product. There are restrictions on the size of the retail space, signage laws have been challenging as well."* Another 12.5% of producers indicated that regulations around processing facilities were a major challenge to creating local markets, especially for cheese-making and meat processing.

The internal factors which producers found challenging, largely related to marketing skills and the time available to dedicate to the enterprise. Twenty eight percent of producers explained that one of their biggest challenges was having enough time to run the production and marketing aspects of the enterprise. Having the appropriate marketing skills and ability to promote their own product was a concern for at least 16% of producers in the study. Having enough time or available (and affordable) labour was cited as a limiting factor by12.5% of producers when deciding how many markets to sell to and how to manage both production and distribution. A producer describes, *"We just need more time for marketing. We are small and can't handle a full-time sales person, but I am busy with production and running the business."* Sixteen percent of producers added that their location was not conducive to retail sales so they had to travel farther to find enough consumers. As result, producers often restrict the size of their enterprise based on internal factors as much as the external factors that hinder their ability to expand.

4.8 Conclusions

As portrayed by the producers in this study, local food enterprises are not firmly planted in the alternative food system and routinely fall into the 'hybrid' system described by Ilbery and Maye (2006). Enterprise complexity is a result of the many possible marketing channels and opportunities that exist in the growing local food economy. These opportunities have created an environment where producers of all types and scale can gain access to local consumers and engage with local markets in varying scales of production. To a large extent, many of these opportunities are pursued as a diversification strategy, either expanding the number of local markets, developing a value-added product, or by mixing local and conventional markets. The clear divide between those who sell solely in the local food economy and those who sell in both the local and global food economy is, in fact, in constant flux as the enterprises evolve and transition into new phases of development.

Regardless of how the enterprise was structured most producers shared some common traits. The majority of producers developed local markets primarily through informal networks of friends, family, and neighbors and by advertising through local media sources. They made formal connections to markets such as restaurants, retailers, and wholesalers by focusing on the quality of fresh picked and hand delivered products. While producers generally felt that local food was important for their local economy and community, they did not always have the opportunity to support it by purchasing local products from one another. On the other hand, in several cases, producers were able to develop enterprises that not only supported themselves, but also created opportunities for other producers in the region. All of the enterprises that involved some specialty aspects, such as processing or packinghouses, were creating a marketing outlet for producers who would otherwise have to develop their own outlets. In addition, many of the producers with large retail spaces on their property were buying products from other local producers, allowing those producers to focus on production rather than marketing and/or value-added projects.

The major challenges facing local producers in this study are similar to those reported by previous studies of producers in local food economies (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007; Ross, 2006). Wholesale or supermarket access was generally challenging for smaller scale producers. All producers felt that the current food system, which relies heavily on cheap imports, undercut their prices and discouraged consumers from buying locally. Farmers see the current structure as largely beyond their influence and tend to focus in internal challenges. Resources such as time, affordable labour, and marketing skills were common challenges that are also reflected in the literature on producers in general.

An additional set of challenges specific to local marketing channels are lack of infrastructure for processing and distribution as well as municipal policies or regulations that create excessive red tape for local producers. While producers indicated that external factors have created some challenges to marketing products locally, most did not believe there was any way to overcome them. Indeed, producers tended to take on responsibility for their own success rather than lament about the current state of food and farm policy. Although, they recognize and dislike the current situation, they largely believe that little will change and that more can be accomplished by working on factors internal to the enterprise such as doing a better job of marketing and educating consumers about the benefits of buying local.

This study has illustrated the empirical diversity and richness present within the local food economy in southern Ontario, and has identified at least some of the rationale for market-mixing. The local food economy is growing, but producers are still very much intertwined with the global food economy. Therefore the local food economy as a whole is not separate or distinct from the global but a hybrid version of the two. Further explorations of farmers' strategies for developing markets and interacting with local food movements would be useful for expanding the current understanding of local food economies and the interactions of producers and the rest of the food system.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an overview of the major findings and contributions contained in the previous chapters. The research presented in this thesis aimed to explore the dynamic relationship between local food organizations and local food producers and the challenges each face in growing the local food economy. There were three main research objectives associated with this study.

1. The first objective was explore how the evolution of local food organizations, acting as intermediaries, influences distinctions in composition, structural characteristics and central purpose, and impacts the ability of organizations to provide services to the local food community, especially producers. This was accomplished by following the development life cycle of two organizations through interviews with the organizing members and a review of supporting documents.
2. The second objective was to document the diversity of perspectives among local food organizers and producers, and understand the impact of those perspectives on producer engagement with the organization. This objective was satisfied through interviews with board and committee members from two local food organizations and with producers participating in the initiatives coordinated by each organization.
3. The third objective was to assess local food producer characteristics, strategies and motivations for engaging in the local food economy, and to identify the extent and rationale of market-mixing in local. This objective was accomplished through

interviews with self identified local food producers and provides empirical evidence to support the concept of food system 'hybridity'.

In this final chapter, the major findings are integrated and summarized in order to reflect on the research project as a whole. Insights gleaned from this research are discussed in the context of the current literature on the geography of alternative food systems generally, and cross-disciplinarily work on local food systems specifically. Following, are some personal reflections on the methodologies and research process, including data collection, analysis, and writing. Finally, some suggestions for future research endeavours are discussed.

5.1 Key Findings and Empirical Insights

Intermediaries, including non-profit organizations, have a strong presence in the local food system in southern Ontario, emphasizing the benefits of the closer spatial aspects such as social and economic returns to the community (Campbell, 1997; Anderson and Cook, 1999; Renting et al., 2003; Feagan, 2007; Allen and Hinrichs, 2007). The first manuscript (Chapter Two) explored two organizations, FLW and HPFTTN as they worked to achieve these broad social goals by providing support to local producers in the form of marketing services in hopes to grow the roster of producers in the local food economy and create awareness and interest among consumers. Several key factors were identified as being important in building a strong local food promotional organization:

- **Presence of clear and commonly understood goals**: FLW had a clearly established mandate understood by all stakeholders, which facilitated the garnering of support and "selling it message" to the broader community. Whereas HPFFTN had a diverse set of goals stemming from the diverse set of organizers and the lack of strategic planning activities. As a result, FLW matured quickly and was capable of garnering resources and community support required for expanding capacity. HPFFTN struggled through several start-up phases and was unable to gain the same credibility and resource base which limited its ability to provide meaningful services to producers.

- **Strong and visible leadership with connections to producers and community:** A dedicated staff member with strong leadership qualities is essential for keeping an organization focused on a clear set of goals, creating visibility and building capacity. Without a full-time staff member in HPFTTN there was no champion for the cause able to dedicate the necessary energy and time to move the initiative forward and garner outside support. FLW is able to credit much of its early success to the presence of a committed board of directors and a full-time executive director who was able to build relationships and create continuity.
- **Available operating funds that keep programs consistent and stable**: Maintaining funds for programming, operations, and staff are a critical component of organizational development. HPFTTN's difficulty in obtaining a secure and continuous source of funding hampered its' ability evolve and grow while FLW flourished under the support of municipal start-up funding and a large multi-year grant which was used to hire permanent staff who could provide dedicated time and effort to achieving outcomes.
- **Support or 'buy-in' from producers and the community:** In order to meet the needs of the stakeholders and accomplish a set of goals, community involvement is necessary. The cornerstone of these promotional organizations is the publication of a

map of local producers and so willingness to participate on the part of the producer is essential. The strength of an involved group of stakeholders is seen in FLW where the organization had support from municipal government and broad producer participation.

These four factors are all important for the successful growth of a local food organization and are reflected in the literature on organizational capacity in general (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Foster-Fishman et al., 2001; Eisinger, 2002; Strichman et al., 2008). The fourth factor, 'buy-in' from producers, provided the foundation for the second manuscript (Chapter Three). The perspectives of both the organizers and the producers were explored as a way to understand local food promotion organizations can better engage producers and develop long-term relationships. Some of the important features that were discovered include:

- **Producers tend to focus on the personal experiences while organizers focus on community experiences**: Organizers tend to portray local food as a way to solve community issues while producers portray it as a means of livelihood and good for consumers. Organizations want to play a role in building awareness and creating market opportunities for local producers as a means to generating larger social goods.
- **Organizational success and ability to communicate that success is important when recruiting producers:** FLW, with a longer history and many proven accomplishments was more successful at gaining producer trust and support. Similarly, their clear set of services and proven outcomes generated a more positive perspective from producers. HPFTTN was at a disadvantage because they did not have a dedicated change agent who could facilitate producer involvement.

- ***Buy Local Buy Fresh* initiative is an agricultural innovation that will gain support and interest over time:** Most, but not all producers support the idea of an organization that advocates for and promotes local food, but do not feel that they need to be involved beyond their use of the services. Many producers were hesitant to be involved in the Buy Local Buy initiative, but as early adopters became more successful their interest and desire to participate grew.

Finally, understanding the motivations and characteristics of the producers who elect to get involved with the local food promotion organizations enables more meaningful programs to and relationships to develop. Thus, the marketing strategies and motivations of producers who chose to be listed on the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* established the focus for the third manuscript (Chapter Four). Some of the highlights include:

- **Many market opportunities exist and most producers engage in more than one (often as a diversification strategy) which results in enterprise complexity:** Enterprises with a specialty aspect such as processing, packing, and retail outlets not only sell their own products, but create markets for other local producers. Mixed (Hybrid) operations (those that are involved in local direct markets and conventional markets) tend to involve livestock, cash crops and/or processing facilities. Producers who only sell in a local context do so because it gives them flexibility to scale the operation to household ability. Producers selling only in the local market tend to produce fruits, vegetables, and freezer meat and find that regardless of the number of market outlets they use farm-gate or direct sales remain important to their livelihood.
- **Regardless of scale or complexity, most producers utilize multiple marketing channels and develop them primarily through informal networks**: Producers feel

responsible for creating their own success and focus on the internal challenges (marketing skills and time) rather than the external ones. Word of mouth is their most important marketing strategy regardless of size or complexity. In addition, by focusing on the quality of fresh picked and hand delivered products many producers are able to cultivate relationships with restaurants, retailers, and other local producers.

- **External challenges are faced by most local producers regardless of the complexity:** External forces such as cheap imports that under cut prices and discourage local purchases and the lack of infrastructure for processing and distribution are seen as major challenges for the sector. Federal, provincial, and municipal policies are also seen as a hindrance, especially local zoning regulations that restrict on-farm retail and processing facilities.

5.2 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The importance of local food organizations to the growth of the sector is dependent upon the stability and success of the organizations themselves (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007). Understanding organizational lifecycles can help strengthen organizational capacity. The performance of promotional organizations in particular was examined through the lens of lifecycle stages of development (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Jawahar and McLaughlin, 2001). Drawing on organizational capacity and lifecycle literature proved to be a useful exercise and may be useful for wider applications in the local food system literature. Using this approach allowed for the observation of both organizational evolution with a particular emphasis on identity and mandate, while also taking into consideration the internal and external forces that that shaped the organizations' development. The goal was to recognize how these factors impacted the organizations' ability to provide services, but it also allowed for a better understanding of what factors enabled them to adapt and respond to changes in structure, opportunities and community support.

The four stages of organizational development characterized by Jawahar and McLaughlin (2001) each emphasize different activities and elements that allow an organization to evolve into a mature entity capable of carrying out its mandate and maintaining a sustainable base of resources and support. While it was possible to identify the distinct elements of each stage of development, in the end it was difficult to draw distinct boundaries. The stages overlapped significantly for both organizations regardless of the fact that one organization moved through the stages very quickly and the other took a long time to progress, even stalling at certain stages. Although it is useful to draw upon the structured framework of four stages of development, it appears that the presence of particular activities and key factors are what is most important. Especially important are the activities in the growth stage (formalization and goal setting) which seem to be especially critical for success. This is likely because the formalization and development of a strategic plan are often necessary in order to obtain funding and garner community support. Just as these factors are important factors in creating capacity they also impact an organizations evolution through the lifecycle stages.

Regardless of the development stage of an organization, producers' participation is a key aspect of growing and stabilizing the entire local food sector. Many producers are clearly in need of support when developing or growing their enterprise, and for a variety of reasons, marketing seems to be the skill most in demand (Griffin and Frongillo, 2003; Starr et al., 2003; Carnes and Karsten, 2003; Ross, 2006; Ostrom and Jussaume, 2007). Examining local food as an agricultural innovation was outside the scope of this project, but drawing on the adoption of innovation and sustainable agriculture literature helped conceptualize come important aspects of engaging producers. Similar to the way other agricultural innovations were delivered, engaging local producers for the purpose of growing the local food economy (and the intermediary organizations) was dependent on the quality of the innovation and the process by which it is advocated to potential producers (Rogers 1995; Smithers and Furman, 2003). Understanding producer perspectives of local food organizations allows organizations to make adjustments to their strategies for engagement and make programs and services more relevant, thus further encouraging producer participation and success and improving their relations with constituents (producers) and community supporters.

The more recent literature on the place of alternative food systems in a global system suggests that alternative and local food systems are complex and diverse and cannot be easily generalized (Ilbery and Maye, 2006; Trabalzi, 2007). The producer data in this study adds to the understanding of local producer characteristics and supports the 'hybrid' or mixed market concept proposed by Ilbery and Maye (2006) and Trabalzi (2007). This research identified a differentiated food system, one in which producers were reacting to both global and local processes (Arce and Marsden, 1993; Woods, 2009). The extent to which producers were engaging with local markets was complex and not easily categorized. Enterprises demonstrated complexity by adding processing facilities or on farm retail spaces and by making use of multiple marketing strategies in both the local and the mainstream economy. Furthermore, enterprises were often shifting either towards more diversification or transitioning into a new opportunity.

Understanding the challenges that producers faced when participating in the local food system may prove useful for policymakers at federal, provincial and municipal levels decide how to develop regulations and allocate funding or resources in order to improve opportunities in the local food economy. The information can be useful for producers who want to understand other's experiences of working in the local food economy and gain a better perspective on the goals and motivations of local food organizations. New and transitioning producers can glean from the experiences of producers in the study that it is important to design the enterprise in a way that fits with and supports their household circumstances.

5.3 Reflections on the Research Process

A number of challenges arose during the research that warrants some reflection and consideration. One challenging aspect of interviewing individuals who work for or represent an organization or government agency (organizing members) was getting them to respond with their personal experiences and opinions. In most cases this occurred naturally and without much prompting, occasionally resulting in a two-layered response, the party-line and the personal. There were however, a few occasions when it was clear the individual was only responding in a way that supported their employers mandate and agenda. There is no real way to deal with this other than recognize it and the context in which it is coming from.

On the practical level there were several challenges that delayed the start of field work and created additional logistical difficulties. The timeline for interviews was set to begin before the organization had finished compiling the list for their first producer map. Delaying the producer interviews meant beginning the field work during the busy fall harvest season. Producers were often difficult to get in contact with and too busy to set aside time for an interview. As shown in Table 1 (Interview Response Rates – pg 14), over ninety producers were contacted, but only 32 agreed to an interview. This was largely due to difficulties in making contact rather than outright refusals. This extended the field season into the winter months and was further exacerbated by the distanced between producers and snowy winter roads.   Despite these challenges, interviewing producers was generally rewarding and insightful work.

Choosing a case study approach allowed for depth of understanding, but limited the ability to generalize the findings in a much broader capacity. Although the study could have included numerous organizations over a broader area, there would have been less empirical richness that is currently needed in the local food system literature. The argument could also be made in the other direction- more depth that would add further insight. While interviewing 50 individuals in two different organizations provided a valid approach comparing the experiences in the two regions, it should be noted that only producers who self identified as local *and* decided to participate in *the Buy Local Buy Fresh* map were included. This meant that producers who were selling in the local food system, but had not paid to participate in the map were missed, and yet, potentially had insight worth exploring. It also excluded producers who were not participating in the local food economy, but may be willing or interested at some point in time. In both cases, the additional point of view would increase the understanding of local producers' motivations and challenges in the region. This was deemed an acceptable exclusion at the time because it would have broadened the study beyond the original scope and taken more time than was reasonable.

5.4 Future Research Potential

There are numerous ways to approach a research project and each one limits the scope and direction of study. While this study satisfied the research objectives set forth, it also created more questions and draws attention to other possible approaches. At a theoretical level, a particularly interesting expansion could be an exploration of the boundaries of a local food system and the extent to which that local food system is separate or connected to the global conventional food system by incorporating more participants along the supply-chain. An alternative approach would be to build on the organizational lifecycle and capacity aspect by applying the theory to additional local food organizations and further refining the key factors that indicate success.

At the empirical level, there are many ways to build on previous research. It would be interesting to add even more depth to the study by reducing the number of interviews, but adding follow-up interviews or focus groups. This would have allowed for further exploration of topics that appeared to have some importance, but were not the focus of the interview guides. A second interesting approach would have been to follow the producers in Huron-Perth over a period of several years in order to understand how their perspectives and enterprises changed over time as the organization evolved. As noted above, future research could explore the motivations and practices of producers who did not choose to advertise in on the *Buy Local Buy Fresh* map.

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APPENDIX ONE – PRODUCER INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me a little about the history of your farm/enterprise?

2. What is the size of your farming enterprise in acres/ha?

3. What other agricultural enterprises do you operate on your farm?
    a. *Prompts:* Are there any non-agricultural activities located on the farm?

4. What percent of your income is from agricultural enterprises?

5. Has your farm business changed over the past ten years? How?
    a. *Prompts:* What factors led to those changes?

6. Have you implemented any conservation practices or are you participating in any conservation programs?

7. Do you have any special certifications for any aspects of your agricultural enterprises?

8. If yes to either 6 or 7: Do you emphasize this in the marketing of your products?

9. What inputs are you bringing to the farm and where do you source them?

10. How do you go about selecting markets for your farm products and/or seeking out new markets?
    a. *Prompts:* Are you seeking out markets or do the markets find you?

11. What factors impact the decision to choose a local market versus an export market or larger distribution channel?

12. Why do you sell your products locally?

13. Describe the process of developing a relationship with a local market.
    a. *Prompts:* How did you become a local seller?

14. What barriers do you face in selling food locally?

15. Do you feel these barriers can/should be overcome by producers or is there a role for a third party to be involved?
    a. *Prompts:* Why and who?

16. Would you describe your interaction with your consumers as:
    i. Direct contact – on farm, farm stand
    ii. Direct contact – off-farm, farmers market
    iii. Extended Contact- through retailer, restaurant, GFB (local)
    iv. Extended Contact – distributor, processor (non- local)

17. What particular characteristics do you attach to your products in terms of quality?
    a. *Prompts:* How are these values/qualities linked to your production practices and/or processing methods? How important are these qualities to your various marketing channels and sales?

18. Are there any changes you would like to make to the product range or marketing channels you are currently using?

19. How did you become involved in the initiative?
    a. *Prompts:* How are you currently involved?

20. Does the fee for participating in the Map impact your decision to participate?

21. What opportunities/benefits do you perceive from participating?

22. How does participation affect various parts of the farm operation?

23. Have you seen any secondary opportunities arise from your participation?

24. Have you faced any barriers to participation?
    a. *Prompts:* Do you plan to continue?

25. What do you see as the main goal/purpose of the initiative?
    a. *Prompts:* How do those goal/values relate to your reason for participating?
        i. What information was provided to you about the goals/values of FTTN or Foodlink?

26. Did you feel that you need(ed) to agree with or share the goal/values of the FTTN or Foodlink in order to participate?

27. Do you feel the FTTN or Foodlink is currently meeting its goals?

28. Do you feel that the FTTN or Foodlink fulfills a role in connecting farmers with consumers?
    a. *Follow-up:* Should it?

29. What changes would you like to see in the future?

30. Does participating in the FTTN or Foodlink make you feel more connected to your non-farming neighbors or community members?

31. What are some (other) ways you feel connected to your community?
    a. School activities

b. Civic activities
c. Agricultural organizations
d. Non-agricultural organizations

32. What is the importance of selling food locally?

33. How do you determine what is local?

34. What do you think about the term food miles?
   a. *Prompts:* For yourself? For the community?

35. Where do you purchase your own food?

APPENDIX TWO – BOARD AND COMMITTEE INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How did you become involved in Foodlink?

2. What is the value of your involvement from the perspective of your agency or organization?

3. What do you see as the main goal/purpose of the Foodlink?

4. How does that goal relate to the goals of the organization you represent?

5. Are there interests or stakeholders that are not currently represented on the committee?

6. What type of producers would you like to see involved in the Foodlink?
7. *Prompts:* What types of commodities? What types of farms (size, business model, farming practices, etc)?

8. What do you expect from the producers?
    a. *Prompts:* Regarding aspects of product quality? Regarding aspects of production practices? Regarding visibility of the farm? Regarding reliability of the farmer? *Follow-up:* Are there any formal requirements for participation?

9. What does the Foodlink represent?
    a. *Prompts:* For producers? Consumers? Community?

10. What do you see as the benefits/opportunities of participating in the Foodlink?
    a. *Prompts:* For your organization? Producers? Consumers?

11. What do you see as the barriers?

a. *Prompts:* For your organization? For producers? Consumers?

12. What other local food activities are you involved in that may not be part of the Foodlink?
    a. *Prompts:* How do you determine which activities should be part of the Foodlink?

13. What is the importance of creating a local food system in Waterloo Region?
    a. *Prompts:* How does Foodlink activities relate to rural development and community issues?

14. Do you feel that Foodlink is currently meeting its goals?

15. What changes would you like to see in the future?